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## **Will there be tiers in heaven?**

### **An examination of the implications of the resurrection of the body for disabled people**

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Will there be tiers in heaven? An examination of the  
implications of the resurrection of the body for disabled  
people.

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
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## Abstract

My research looks at the question of what life in heaven will be like for people with disabilities, and in particular for those with learning disabilities. I am examining the ideas of Augustine, and of L'Arche in the writings of Jean Vanier and Henri Nouwen, looking to see where they correspond and where they differ. One reason for this research is to answer the question of continuity of identity for people in the next life. Will someone be recognisable as themselves if their disability is removed in heaven? Another is to consider how eschatology impinges on pastoral practice for people with disabilities.

In spite of the great differences in approach between the L'Arche voices and the voice of Augustine, there are some areas where they can speak to each other. One of these relates to community since for both Augustine and L'Arche, community is a key feature of human life. Another area is one we can call illumination or vision. Augustine's ideas of vision, and in particular of what he calls intellectual vision relate to the L'Arche belief that people with learning disabilities have a positive and beneficial influence on the people around them. This is relevant to the responsibility Church communities have not only to welcome people with learning disabilities into their midst, but also to appreciate the gifts that those people bring. Such gifts can enable the whole community to gain enlightenment and a sense of the divine presence in the here-and-now, as a foretaste of the joys of heaven. People with learning disabilities can thus become prophets who help others to come closer to God, and to have a vision of what their heavenly home might be like.

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## Introduction

This journey starts with a question, and like all good questions, the attempt to answer it leads to further questions. The first question is that of a young girl who has a learning disability. At the time when she asked her question such people were described as retarded, although now we rightly condemn such a label. The question is described by Robert Perske, a theologian who worked as a chaplain in a large hospital in the United States.

*... one of the warmest theological questions about heaven took place in the home of friends. Their fifteen-year-old daughter quizzed her parents about what heaven was like: "Will I be retarded when I get to heaven?" The parents answered that she would not. There would be no sickness, no pain. Everyone would be perfect. To this she responded, "But, how will you know me then?"*<sup>1</sup>

This story raises questions about the continuity of identity, something which is also echoed in the song written by Eric Clapton after the death of his son.

*Would you know my name  
If I saw you in heaven?  
Would it be the same  
If I saw you in heaven?*<sup>2</sup>

Both the young girl and Eric Clapton are asking the same question. Will we recognise those we love on earth when we meet them in heaven? Will those who have a disability here on earth be 'perfect' in heaven, in which case, will they be recognisable as the imperfect person they are in this earthly life? Does God needs the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in heaven? Will there be ramps (or tiers) in heaven? On earth, a place of imperfection, we need things like the DDA in order to promote the rights of disabled people. In heaven, presumably, since it is a place of perfection, there will be no need for such things. It can also be argued, however, that a person's disability is an integral part of their identity. This means that any account of the eschaton must take into account how a person's identity will be affected by removing their disability. How will a disabled person be recognised in heaven, how will they be known, if they no longer have the impairment which was an essential part of their identity on earth? Could it be that an exploration of disability in the eschaton might uncover implications for the way we view disability in this present life? These questions indicate areas

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Perske, "The Theological Views of Some of My Mentally Retarded Friends," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 7, no. 1 (2003). p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Clapton and Will Jennings, *Tears in Heaven*.

of exploration for this project. Before the questions are more clearly defined, some theological background is needed.

### Theological Background

The questions being considered have links to several different theological areas and these aspects will be considered in later chapters. The questions are concerned with both systematic theology and practical theology, and touch on theological reflection, pastoral application and even existential concern. One theological voice which bridges these gaps is that of the Dutch priest, Henri Nouwen. It was during the last decade of his life that Nouwen had the opportunity to develop his thinking about disability. Nouwen took the post of pastor at L'Arche Daybreak in Toronto, having given up his career as a professor at Yale and Harvard, and moved instead to live alongside men and women with profound and multiple disabilities. In this environment, to his surprise, and to the surprise of many of those who knew him in the academic world, Nouwen thrived. Quite early on in his time at Daybreak, Nouwen was asked to take particular responsibility for caring for a man called Adam. It may not be the experience of every assistant<sup>3</sup>, but for Nouwen, working with Adam certainly brought him personal insights which he would not have had by any other means.

Nouwen believed that people with disabilities were of tremendous worth. He valued them for their blessedness as sons and daughters of God. He also felt that they held, within their sufferings and vulnerability, treasure which was of value to others. Writing in his daily meditation book, *Bread for the Journey*, he says 'When we dismiss people out of hand because of their apparent woundedness, we stunt their lives by ignoring their gifts, which are often buried in their wounds.'<sup>4</sup> This idea of something hidden, a kind of buried treasure, is also found in Vanier.<sup>5</sup>

In the epilogue to *Beyond the Mirror*, after his recovery from a life-threatening accident, Nouwen explains how the profoundly handicapped members of the L'Arche community are a reminder to him of the insights he gained while he was in hospital.

Because they have nothing to prove, nothing to accomplish, Hsi-Fu and all the weak and broken people of our world are given to me to call me back, again and again, to the place of truth that I have come to know. They have no success to achieve, no

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<sup>3</sup> An assistant is the term given to those able-bodied people who choose to live and work with those with disabilities, who are known as core members of L'Arche.

<sup>4</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*(HarperOne, 2006). p. 91. [March 17<sup>th</sup>.]

<sup>5</sup> As for example in J. Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*(Paulist Pr, 2004).

career to protect, no name to uphold. They are always 'in intensive care', always dependent, always in the portal of death. They can bring me in touch and hold me close to that place in me where I am like them: weak, broken and totally dependent. It is the place of true poverty where God calls me blessed and says to me: 'Don't be afraid. You are my beloved child, on whom my favour rests.'<sup>6</sup>

What Nouwen had discovered from his accident, and from living at Daybreak, was that it was good to be dependent, to be weak, because that is when he became close to God. Those vulnerable people had taught Nouwen an important lesson which reversed all the things he had experienced in the highly elite intellectual world of Yale and Harvard. Those were places where he had not felt so blessed and beloved. The community around Adam is one 'that proclaims that God has chosen to descend among us as an infant in a stable, in complete weakness and vulnerability, and thus to reveal to us the glory of God.'<sup>7</sup>

For Nouwen, then, those who are vulnerable were able to give insights of God which paralleled those of the infant Christ child. The very fact that he was weak gave Adam tremendous power, a forceful presence in the house.

Adam is the weakest of us all, but without any doubt the strongest bond between us all. Because of Adam there is always someone home; because of Adam there is a quiet rhythm in the house; because of Adam there are moments of silence and quiet; because of Adam there are always words of affection, gentleness, and tenderness; because of Adam there is patience and endurance; because of Adam there are smiles and tears visible to all; because of Adam there is always space for mutual forgiveness and healing ... yes, because of Adam there is peace among us.<sup>8</sup>

Adam's weakness and vulnerability allowed him to be a source of blessing for the community in which he lived. Working with Adam brought Nouwen many rewards. Adam became for him a Christ-bearer, a way to draw closer to Jesus. Nouwen describes how he came to understand the relationships Jesus has with us through his relationship with Adam. 'In his weakness he became a unique instrument of God's grace. He became a revelation of Christ among us.'<sup>9</sup> Less than two months before his death, Nouwen compared the story of Adam with the story of Jesus.

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<sup>6</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen and R. Durback, *Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001). pp. 166-7. Hsi-Fu is the person Nouwen was trying to visit on morning when he was knocked over by car.

<sup>7</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *Finding My Way Home* (St Pauls BYB, 2001). p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen and D Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved* (Orbis Books, 1997). p. 18.

Adam is a sacrament, a sacred place where God spoke to me. Remembering Adam is more than thinking about him and praying for him. It is enabling me to keep close to the Jesus I met in and through him. Adam became real to me because Jesus was real to me, and Jesus became real to me because Adam was real to me. Somewhere, somehow, Adam and Jesus are one.<sup>10</sup>

Support for this idea can be found in Schillebeeckx who argues that grace comes from God not in a vertical way, like rain falling from heaven, but horizontally, by means of the presence of God which is in the world. As he explains

What comes to us from heaven – grace – in fact comes to us *from the world*, from human history with its secular environment. Our personal relationship with God in grace is at the same time a relationship of fellow-humanity and thus of orientation towards the secular world.<sup>11</sup>

What this means is that God's grace is revealed not through something mysterious which comes from on high but through the ordinary events of our world, through fellow human beings, and that must include those human beings who suffer from impairments. This is totally concordant with the ideas of Nouwen that someone like Adam can be a sacrament for him. A sacrament builds bridges between what can be seen and what cannot be seen. The encounter with Adam taught Nouwen something important about the invisible reality of heaven. This led him to the conclusion that the heart was more important than the head so any description of Nouwen's heaven would necessarily include ideas about the supremacy of the heart. Nouwen explains how being in the presence of Adam, a man who could not eat without help, could not talk and could not walk, was healing for him. 'Simply being with him, without anything to do or discuss, brings me to a place in my heart far beyond words or feelings: the place of unity and communion, the place of inner purity and simplicity ... the place of God.'<sup>12</sup>

It is reasonable to suppose that this was how Nouwen imagined heaven would be like. Heaven could be that place of God, beyond words or feelings. Nouwen felt that people like Adam helped him on his spiritual journey towards God. This realisation that being in the presence of someone so severely limited was somehow like being on holy ground was something which Nouwen was certainly aware of. He frequently spoke about Adam in his

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<sup>10</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998). p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist* (Sheed and Ward, 1968). p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, "Home, Healing and Hope," *Letters of L'Arche* 76(1993). p. 3. This article was written by Nouwen as a response to the death of Père Thomas Philippe, the Dominican priest who helped Jean Vanier to found L'Arche.

talks to different groups, and wrote about the effect Adam had on him several times.<sup>13</sup> One of the many talks Nouwen gave about Adam was given on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1985 and later published in various magazines and journals as an article entitled *The Peace that is not of this world*.<sup>14</sup> This was probably typical of the talks Nouwen gave at this time where he drew on his experiences with Adam.

In this talk, first Nouwen introduces his audience to Adam, explaining how Adam has taught him about 'the peace that is not of this world.' There are three aspects to Adam's peace. Firstly Adam's peace is founded on the idea that being is more important than doing. This means that Adam's existence is more important than anything he does or does not do and that indicates that in the eschaton we will be in the presence of God without doing anything. This is compatible with Augustine's description of heaven being a place where 'we shall have leisure to be still, and we shall see that he is God.'<sup>15</sup> Augustine was quoting from Psalm 46, but it seems plausible that the stillness he describes is the same as Adam's peace.

The second important aspect of Adam's peace is that it is focused on the supremacy of the heart, meaning that cognitive abilities are secondary to love. For Nouwen the key human ability was to love and that was far more important than the ability to think. He then explains that this is not anything to do with our emotions, but rather 'by heart I mean the centre of our being where God has hidden the divine gifts of trust, hope, and love.'<sup>16</sup> This is what enables us to enjoy relationships with each other.

Furthermore, Nouwen explains that this love is God's first love for us, planted in us at the moment of conception.

I am speaking about a love between us that transcends all thoughts and feelings, precisely because it is rooted in God's first love, a love that precedes all human loves. The mystery of Adam is that in his deep mental and emotional brokenness he has become so empty of all human pride that he has become the preferable mediator of that first love.<sup>17</sup>

By using the word 'empty' here there seems to be a suggestion of kenosis. Perhaps those signs of prophesy are seen more clearly because they have been preceded by kenosis. When someone like Adam has been emptied of all the usual human activities, thoughts, concerns,

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of books include Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved*. Nouwen, *Finding My Way Home*.

<sup>14</sup> "The Peace That Is Not of This World," *The Journal of Christian Healing* 10, no. 1 (1988). pp. 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. H.S. Bettenson and G.R. Evans (Penguin Books, 2003). 22.30 p. 1090.

<sup>16</sup> Nouwen, "The Peace That Is Not of This World." p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

they are left as a pure soul who speaks, with actions louder than words, of the Kingdom of God.

The third aspect of Adam's peace is that it encourages and supports building up the community, because Adam requires the community around him to gather in peace, to strive for harmony, to work together to overcome these enormous problems in his day-to-day existence that mean he requires total help for everything he does. In spite of the fact that the assistants come from a wide range of backgrounds, and speak different languages, they still manage to work together as a family in fellowship with each other. This process of accommodating differences and working together impressed Nouwen and led him to consider it as a model for the harmony of heaven.

Nouwen had not really considered the topic of disability before he went to live in L'Arche Daybreak but the encounter was to change his thinking considerably. A key question for this project, therefore, is to ask what disability studies can teach theologians. When Nouwen met Adam he was surprised how much this profoundly disabled man could teach him about theology, and also about himself. Nouwen began to wonder about his own identity when he encountered people who were clearly human beings and yet so different from himself. This project should consider, therefore, some aspects of identity, asking whether identity will be preserved in the eschaton and considering the implications of such preservation. When Adam died Nouwen looked again at his ideas of eschatology, ideas which had already been explored when he had what amounted to a near-death experience. What would the eschatology of L'Arche have looked like, if Nouwen had set out to describe such a thing? The community of L'Arche supported and strengthened Nouwen in the final decade of his life and so it seems appropriate to ask about the importance of the community aspect of the eschaton. Finally when Nouwen describes the brokenness of Adam leading to his being a conduit for God's love, does this suggest that disability can become something glorious?

### Research Questions

In order to examine all these questions in a systematic way they will be grouped together under five headings. The first, which we will call the **Disability question**, relates to the word 'retarded' and asks what does it mean to be imperfect, disabled or impaired? In order to answer this question we will explore the field of disability studies where our first consideration will be to look at the language of disability. By providing an appropriate framework for the discussion of disability this chapter allows us to consider alternative

models of disability, particularly the medical and social models, in order to see how these can be applied to the area of theology.

The second heading is the **Identity question**, since ‘how will you know me?’ is asking to what extent someone’s disability is part of their identity. In order to answer this question interlocutors will be chosen from theology, where theological contributions will come from Augustine, Rowan Williams and Irenaeus. The work of John Swinton on the condition of Dementia, will also shed light on the question of what happens to our identity when we lose our memory.

The third heading addresses the **Eschatology question** and this considers the concept of heaven as it relates to the idea of a future place of perfection, where every tear will be wiped away. If the disability material is talking about imperfection, then it will be necessary to grasp the idea of perfection and what the limits might be to this. An eschatological view is provided again by Augustine, but also by other interlocutors such as Jean Vanier, Henri Nouwen and others who have been associated with the communities of people with learning disabilities which Vanier founded known as L’Arche.

The fourth aspect of the question relates to the idea of knowing someone, and this can be discussed as the **Community question**. The extent to which individuals will recognise someone in heaven is closely linked to the idea of heaven as a community of beings. The theology of L’Arche allows us to consider this aspect but contributions also come from Augustine who lived his life in community and described it so appropriately in his *City of God*. This question is important because if heaven is not a communal place then the answer might simply be that God will know you in heaven. The girl asked ‘how will you know me?’ though, not ‘how will I be recognised?’ and so it is important to explore how each individual will be known and recognised as that individual. A pantheistic idea of being part of the great whole would not satisfy this aspect.

Finally questions arise about how a transformation can take place when we look at disability in a different way. Can disability have any benefits? Can a shift in thinking away from seeing disability as tragedy, as a problem to be solved, aid our understanding of what heaven will be like for people who have a disability? This theme looks at the transformative power of disability and is referred to as the **Wounds and Scars question**. The choice of title comes from Augustine who discusses the wounds and scars of the martyrs and how these may be visible in heaven not as blemishes but as badges of honour. Gregory of Nyssa’s description of



the death of his sister Macrina and her scar is relevant here. The challenge, however, is to be able to apply such thinking to those who have invisible scars, those who have intellectual impairments. What visible sign marks with a badge of honour the person who suffers from depression, or autism?

An overarching question from these can be summarised as ‘what are the implications of the resurrection of the body for disabled people?’ It is this questions which the research will attempt to address. Methodology will first consist of a literature review in order to find out the range and limitations of current understanding of the topic of disability studies. Attempts will be made to link current thinking to theological ideas and a particular area of concern will be non-physical disabilities, including learning disability and cognitive impairment. The question of identity will introduce the view of other theologians and these will also contribute to an understanding of community. The idea of the resurrection of the body will be explored, but since this is such a broad topic the focus will be on Augustine in order to limit the scope of this exploration. In addition Augustine has been so influential on later thought that starting with his ideas will provide a solid basis for understanding Christian thought on the eschaton. The application of these previously considered ideas will be made to those with learning disabilities by consideration of the community life of L’Arche, using the writings of Jean Vanier and others who have been associated with L’Arche. This will address the question of community, and will also indicate how the gifts of the disabled might be appreciated. This will also address the issue of context, showing how disability can be interpreted in a different way.

## Chapters outline

With the exception of the disability question which is principally addressed in the discrete first chapter, the other questions are considered throughout the thesis. The disability chapter begins by outlining some of the semantic issues and searches for disability-friendly vocabulary. The chapter then gives a brief history of disability studies in order to understand where the two major models have come from and to understand their limitations. Some consideration is given to non-physical disabilities and the links between disability studies and theology are outlined. The case-study of Teresa de Cartagena, a fifteenth-century Spanish nun who was deaf, is used to explore some of the problems of disability which relate to the questions above and her contribution is particularly illustrative of the transformative power of disability.

The second chapter is devoted to Augustine's contribution and here we consider his eschatology in order to appreciate how Augustine might have answered the question of 'will I be retarded in heaven?' Augustine's language might be different, since he refers to 'simpletons'<sup>18</sup> but it is clear that he was familiar with a wide range of disabilities, both physical and intellectual. Augustine laid the foundations for much subsequent eschatology, particularly in the *City of God* and in his homilies. His reflections on what we might call the mechanics of bodily resurrection, his understanding of the beatific vision and his concept of the eternal Sabbath, are just three of the areas which are of particular relevance.

The theology of L'Arche forms the basis of the third chapter, which looks at how L'Arche communities offer an alternative framework for disability, one which challenges the commonly held attitudes towards people with learning disabilities. Vanier's paradoxical suggestion is that those who are poor in the eyes of the world, especially those who lack mental capacities, have gifts to offer the rich and capable. Vanier encourages a movement away from success and self-sufficiency into a place of vulnerability, something which he terms 'moving down the ladder'. Henri Nouwen also adds some insights to support Vanier's ideas about communities of people with disabilities, particularly his idea of realised eschatology.

In the penultimate chapter these different aspects are brought together in a systematic way by considering the themes which they have in common and discussing areas of difference. This chapter allows an exploration of what it might mean for a disabled person to be in heaven, to be recognised as they are, to be able to retain their identity, and to enjoy the perfect love of God in all its fullness. Four different models are proposed for identity in the eschaton, models which allow for different ways of answering the 'how will you know me?' question.

In the final chapter the implications for current pastoral practice are considered, in the light of building the kingdom of God on earth. Instead of considering those with disabilities as people who are lacking something the chapter explores ways of understanding the gifts that disabled people bring to faith communities. Evidence is drawn from accounts of parents and carers of those who have severe cognitive impairment. Recommendations are made for the celebration of difference and diversity so that those who have disabilities can truly become people who reveal the works of God.

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<sup>18</sup> B. Brock and J. Swinton, *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012). p. 67. Augustine's *On The Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, Ch. 66 is cited.

## Chapter 1      Approaching the discourse on disability

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is threefold. The first task is to explore and clarify the terminology used in a discussion of disability. The second is to consider how disability discourse has been carried out by academics and disability activists. Finally the connection between disability studies and theology is made. Four steps will be taken in order to achieve these aims. First there is a section on disability- friendly language. This will be followed by a brief history of the disability movement. The third section is on disability and social constructionism including an excursus into mental illness and cognitive disabilities. The final section looks at disability discourse and theology.

### 1. Disability Friendly Language

The world of disability is awash with vocabulary. Some terms are ‘in’ while others are definitely ‘out’. Sometimes it can be hard to know what is acceptable and what is not, since the rules change with the time and the circumstances. This section aims to find a path through these difficulties by looking at the way labels are used and have changed.

#### 1.1 Language games and boundary disputes

Wittgenstein’s concept of language games introduces the idea that we are, as it were, hoodwinked into believing something is true because of the word used to describe it. ‘A picture held us captive. And we couldn’t get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably.’<sup>19</sup> This can happen with the language of disability, if we cannot look beyond the label given to someone’s condition to the person behind that label. Another aspect of the same issue is considered by Mairian Corker who explains that language

is not a system of signs with fixed meanings with which everyone agrees, but a site of variation, contention and potential conflict. As such, language is about power

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<sup>19</sup> L Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations Translated by Gem Anscombe* (Blackwell, 1974). (115) p. 48e.

relations and politics, because discourses compete with each other on many different levels and in many different contexts.<sup>20</sup>

Definitions of what is normal are relative and the boundary between what is normal and what is not is far from clear. This applies to physical health as well as to mental faculties. If the term 'normal' cannot be clearly defined, then how can abnormality be defined? If someone cannot do something which most other people can do, is this a disability? The answer depends on how important it is to be able to do that thing, in order to function in society. If someone is tone deaf they may not be able to sing in tune, but that could scarcely be said to limit their life opportunities, so long as they do not desire a career as an opera singer. Equally, colour-blindness is also only a problem for certain occupations. Would it be appropriate to describe someone as disabled if they were tone deaf, colour-blind or allergic to nuts?

Another example of how boundaries in disability are hard to locate comes when considering Autistic Spectrum disorders where Judy Singer uses the term 'fuzzy boundaries'.<sup>21</sup> Since the name of the condition includes the word 'spectrum' it suggests that people do not belong in discrete, clear-cut categories. This is something which may well be true of many other conditions and leads to the idea that we are all disabled in some way, in that sense that we all fall in different places on the spectrum of ability. Of course, there are some conditions where it is clearly possible to say 'I do not have this' such as infections where pathogens can be accurately identified. But there are many other conditions where people can move within a certain range and even change from day to day.<sup>22</sup>

Deafness is another area where the boundaries are not clear-cut. Deaf people who are born into a signing deaf community do not consider themselves as disabled. Instead they consider themselves to be members of a different cultural and linguistic community with its own norms and experiences. Someone who has always used spoken language to communicate and

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<sup>20</sup> M. Corker, "Disability Discourse in a Postmodern World," in *The Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. T. Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 1998). p. 226.

<sup>21</sup> J. Singer, "'Why Can't You Be Normal for Once in Your Life?'" From a 'Problem with No Name' to the Emergence of a New Category of Difference," in *Disability Discourse*, ed. M. Corker and S. French (McGraw-Hill, 1999). p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Many mental illnesses are transient, with symptoms that vary in severity from day to day, or week to week. Depression is a prime example of this and depression is a symptom which, according to the NHS website, about one in ten people experience at some time in their lives.  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Depression/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

who goes deaf in adult life, however, might be likely to feel very disabled when their chosen means of communication is no longer available to them.

When boundaries are not clear-cut then areas of tension emerge. A similar tension can also be found in academic debates, such as that between structuralism and post-structuralism and Mairian Corker helpfully suggests that one cannot be understood without the other. In the same way, in order to understand disability one must have some understanding of what being able-bodied means. As Corker explains 'the identity of something is as much a function of what it is not as what it is.'<sup>23</sup> This statement has been challenged by those, like Tanya Titchkosky,<sup>24</sup> who reasons that we would not define a woman as someone who lacks a penis, or a man as someone who lacks a vagina.<sup>25</sup> A further example of this tendency to define people by what they are not can be found in psychiatry where psychiatric records note the negative (what the patient cannot do) and fail to mention what is working properly. This gives only part of the picture of what the person is like.

## 1.2 Labels and stigma

Labels are undeniably useful in that they offer a convenient way to summarise a situation. Many of the labels used in the field of disability have come from medical terminology, which is necessary for the purposes of diagnosis and treatment. When a doctor has identified that a patient has a particular condition they can then instigate the necessary treatment for that condition. A label is an objective way to describe someone, so that everyone who deals with that person knows the situation, and knows where they stand. Even labels which stereotype can be considered to have survival value. A person walking down a dark alley late at night seeing a group of hooded youths approaching cannot afford the luxury of being open-minded about their intentions. Nevertheless, in the area of disability, labels have rightly been heavily criticised for being insensitive, misleading and sometimes insulting.

One particular difficulty with labels is that they can be difficult to shift, a concept Rosenhan refers to as 'sticky labels'.<sup>26</sup> Rosenhan's study of pseudopatients, who falsely reported

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<sup>23</sup> Corker, "Disability Discourse in a Postmodern World." In T. Shakespeare, *Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998). p. 227

<sup>24</sup> Titchkosky says that people with visual impairments often struggle with whether to call themselves 'blind' or not. Blindness is usually polarised by the terms blind or sighted and when someone has *some* vision, as is often the case, and when the degree of vision changes, as with progressive eye problems, whether or not to describe oneself as blind becomes an issue. 'I was working with a cultural map that pointed out the land of blindness and that of sightedness with a clearly defined border between the two.' T. Titchkosky, "Cultural Maps: Which Way to Disability?," in *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*, ed. M. Corker and T. Shakespeare (Bloomsbury, 2002). p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> DL Rosenhan, "On Being Sane in Insane Places," *Science* 179, no. 4070 (1973). p. 252.

hearing voices, and were admitted to psychiatric wards in the USA, revealed that even when they no longer reported these symptoms, and were discharged from hospital, their notes described them as having 'schizophrenia in remission'. Once someone has been described with a particular label then the concepts that accompany that label will be permanently attached to that person. It may not make any difference that those concepts are incorrect, the link has been made.

Some labels change with the passage of time. The term 'retarded' has become outdated now, and has generally been replaced by terms such as 'persons with developmental disabilities' or similar variations on this theme. Even so, the concepts that are in the minds of those who use the new terms may be no different from before. The stigma persists, even though the words may be different. Lerita Coleman comments that 'Because stigmas mirror culture and society, they are in constant flux,'<sup>27</sup> and maintains that 'stigma is a response to the dilemma of difference.'<sup>28</sup> When she uses the phrase 'dilemma of difference' she is implying that people are faced with a problem when they confront someone who is different from themselves. This is at the heart of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory,<sup>29</sup> a theory which tries to explain why it is part of human nature to be prejudiced and to cling to stereotypes.

According to Social Identity Theory it is impossible to remove, entirely, the tendency to favour those who are like us, and to behave less-favourably towards those who are different. Such tendencies strengthen self-esteem, and help people to feel good about themselves, since they belong, as they think, to the superior group. Having said this, once we realise we are doing this, we can strive to overcome our hostility, and try to work together towards a common goal. In the case of disability, such a goal might be to enable people with disabilities to live fulfilled lives as full members of their communities.

All labels, positive or negative, out-dated or state-of-the-art will tend to convey a message which is mediated by the context in which that label is perceived. If society understands a label as belonging to something that is regarded as inferior, negative or undesirable in some

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<sup>27</sup> L.M. Coleman, "Stigma: An Enigma Demystified," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (Routledge, 1997). p. 147.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> H Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Intergroup relations: Essential readings* (2001). Tajfel's Social Identity Theory posits that when people are divided into groups, even for the most trivial of reasons, they will tend to identify positive characteristics about the in-group, that is the group to which they belong, and negative characteristics about the out-group. This is done in order to boost their self-esteem by believing that they belong to the better group.

way, then the person wearing that label will be saddled with the concept that goes with it. Consider the range of different labels in this list from Deborah Creamer:

“outdated” words like “idiot,” “imbecile,” “feeble-minded,” “moron,” “defective,” and “retarded,” just as contemporary phrases such as “persons with mental retardation,” “persons with developmental disabilities,” “persons specially challenged,” “or persons with special needs” all portray societal attitudes towards the category of cognitive disability.<sup>30</sup>

So society will view people with such labels in a variety of ways and merely changing the label does not mean that the negative associations will disappear. When Wittgenstein says, ‘if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use’,<sup>31</sup> he might agree that using the word ‘retarded’ is no different from using the phrase ‘persons with developmental disabilities’ if these terms are used in identical ways.

### 1.3 Medical Terminology

Definitions are often heavily influenced by the medical approach, since it is frequently doctors, in the first instance, who define, describe and label whatever impairments the person has. Doctors are expected to advise on treatment and the medical world’s preference for scientific language does have the advantage of being objective. Doctors can also give help with rehabilitation and modern practices of helping disabled people to lead fulfilling lives are preferable to leaving them in institutions, which is what used to happen in the past.<sup>32</sup>

The medical approach makes use of rigidly defined classification systems.<sup>33</sup> One major system is that of the World Health Organisation (WHO) who devised the Classification of Impairments Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) and the Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF),<sup>34</sup> the latter being a revision of the former. The ICF considers functions and contextual factors but neither model takes into account the ideas of the social model that disability is socially constructed. These have their usefulness, but conflict with more loosely-defined, ‘user-led’ approaches. Disabled people themselves were not consulted about the medical classification systems and some resist being labelled, or prefer to have their

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<sup>30</sup> DB Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*(Oxford University Press, USA, 2009). p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*(HarperCollins, 1965). p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Even the names that were given to such institutions sound outdated today. An example is the institution once called the Royal Hospital for Incurables (RHI) in Putney which is now known as the Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability. Their website has the slogan ‘Finding Ability in Disability’ as its banner headline, [Website <http://www.rhn.org.uk/home.asp> accessed 16.11.10] a sign that more positive attitudes prevail in modern institutions.

<sup>33</sup> Examples of these include the WHO’s ICF, and the DSM, which is used in the USA.

<sup>34</sup> The ICF can be obtained here <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/> accessed 16.11.10.

own say in how they are described. Nevertheless, in spite of its shortcomings, the medical approach has been influential. Wilson and Beresford<sup>35</sup> suggest that diagnostic classification systems serve three purposes:

1. 'Aiding clinical management'
2. 'facilitating communication between professionals'
3. 'facilitating research into causes, preventions and treatment'

This has the drawback of the possibility of moulding the person's symptoms so that they fit the categories and classification system. Wilson and Beresford are among the critics of the DSM, saying that 'the DSM [...] is based on an illusion of science and is fundamentally flawed.'<sup>36</sup>

In an article by Theresia Degener about anti-discrimination legislation there is a mention of the way definitions of disability, such as that of the WHO, try to look not just at the disabled individual but also at their circumstances. This comes with a difficulty, when the circumstances of the disabled person's life are compounded by the way that person is treated by the society in which they live. The consequence of this can be a kind of circular argument whereby the person's disability is a result of the discrimination and the discrimination is the result of their disability, as Degener explains:

the WHO notion of disability as a result of an interaction between an impaired individual and his or her social environment mixes characteristics and treatment. A discrimination law has to separate these two things by saying which treatment is regarded as prohibited discrimination and against whom. Disability discrimination laws thus need to define discrimination as well as disability and it therefore makes no sense to define disability as the outcome of discrimination.<sup>37</sup>

In reality the WHO categories and diagnostic systems are not always matched by such tidiness. It might seem obvious to say that a blind person is one who cannot see, or that a deaf person cannot hear. Reading Rod Michalko's account of how his sight deteriorated over a number of years it is clear that blindness is not so easy to define.<sup>38</sup> As he wrestles with trying to identify the point at which he could be described accurately as 'blind', the category no longer seems as water-tight as the classification systems would like.

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<sup>35</sup> A. Wilson and P. Beresford, "Madness, Distress and Postmodernity: Putting the Record Straight," in *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*, ed. M. Corker and T. Shakespeare (Continuum, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.147.

<sup>37</sup> T Degener, "The Definition of Disability in (German and) International Discrimination Law," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>38</sup> Rod Michalko, *The Difference That Disability Makes* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 2002).



There are also great drawbacks to relying on medical terminology since this cannot provide the whole story. Medical terminology is inclined to emphasise the personal tragedy aspect of disability. Simi Linton explains that using terms such as ‘wheelchair bound’ and ‘victim of cerebral palsy’ emphasise someone’s limitations and heighten the tragedy aspects. It is better, she says, to use more neutral phrases such as ‘uses a wheelchair’ or ‘has cerebral palsy’.<sup>39</sup>

#### 1.4 Political correctness

Mairian Corker points out that meanings change over time.

Post-structuralism, however, deals specifically with language and discourse, and, as such, is bound up with issues of meaning, representation and identity. Its main premise is that meaning can never be fixed because human discourse is constantly evolving and therefore continually engaged in creating new meanings.<sup>40</sup>

It is not surprising, in view of this statement, that the language of disability and the meanings of labels given to disabled people also change over time. An example of this is from Lennard Davis who explains that the term ‘normal’ has not always meant what it means today and that it originally was only used by mathematicians to describe a line perpendicular to another line. Further he claims that ‘the social process of disabling arrived with industrialization and with the set of practices and discourses that are linked to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation and so on.’<sup>41</sup> He uses the term ableism<sup>42</sup> to describe something just as outmoded and unacceptable as racism and sexism.

Further examples of the way terminology has changed include such terms such as cripple, mentally handicapped, mentally retarded, spastic and Mongoloid, which all sound very old-fashioned and even insulting to the modern ear.<sup>43</sup> Health services no longer always refer to people as patients and the term ‘service-user’ has become the preferred term in some areas. The negative image, however, remains and it is doubtful if the gulf between doctors and their patients can easily be bridged merely by a change of name. Innovations in language can also

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<sup>39</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability : Knowledge and Identity*, Cultural Front; Variation: Cultural Front (Series) (New York: New York University Press, 1998). p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> Corker, "Disability Discourse in a Postmodern World." p. 224.

<sup>41</sup> Lennard J. Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader*(New York: Routledge, 1997). p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Just as discrimination against someone because of their ethnic origin is called racism, so discrimination against someone because of their disability is called ‘ableism’. Similarly ‘audism’ is the term to describe prejudice about people who are deaf.

<sup>43</sup> An example of an unacceptable word is the term ‘invalid’ which has negative connotations and can also mean in-valid, in the sense of not valid; a valid passport opens doors, whilst an invalid one prevents entry.

be difficult for some people to manage. There are plenty of elderly people who find it hard to grasp the importance of using politically correct language.

Although it is no longer usual to call people with learning disabilities ‘retarded’, in the USA this term has only very recently been declared illegal and unacceptable.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless since everyone knows that ‘learning disabled’ means the same thing as the condition formerly known as retarded, the consequences of the label are the same. Advantages of using politically correct language should be weighed against some disadvantages. Terms such as ‘differently abled’ may be used with the best of intentions, but they can seem patronising and instead of reducing the difference between able and disabled, end up emphasising it. In some senses we are all differently abled, in which case the term has no usefulness.

Another problem with politically correct language is that the stigma which a label brings does not always disappear when the label is replaced by a more politically correct term. It is possible that when it was first used the word ‘special’ was considered preferable to ‘handicapped’ or ‘retarded’ but now that people know that it is used to refer to people with learning difficulties, it carries the same negative connotations as before.

### 1.5 Disability-friendly language: new terms

Simi Linton points out that what she calls ‘nice’ words, like special or challenged can be a manifestation of Freudian reaction formation. The ego feels uncomfortable about someone with such a disability so a pleasant word is used to mask this discomfort. She contrasts such ‘nice’ words with the ‘nasty’ ones such as cripple and gimp, while observing that the disabled community has now reclaimed these words and some disabled people will proudly use them to describe themselves, as if to demonstrate that those ‘nasty’ words have no power over them any longer. ‘They are personally and politically useful as a means to comment on oppression because they assert our right to name experience.’<sup>45, 46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Rosa’s Law, as it has come to be known, was fully passed by President Obama signing the Bill on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Rosa has Down’s Syndrome and when her parents learnt that she had been labelled as ‘retarded’ at school they started a campaign, together with other parents, to outlaw the term which they felt invited others to treat her in a negative way. See <http://www.specialolympics.org/rosas-law.aspx> accessed 16.11.10

<sup>45</sup> Linton, *Claiming Disability : Knowledge and Identity*. p.17.

<sup>46</sup> Words such as ‘gimp’ and ‘crip’ seem to be permitted when disabled people use them to describe themselves, whilst an able person using them would be condemned for insensitivity or prejudice. Lennard Davis has a chapter in his book, *Bending Over Backwards*, entitled ‘Crips Strike Back’ in which he reviews the emergence of disability studies being undertaken by disabled researchers. Lennard J. Davis, *Bending over Backwards : Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*(New York: New York University Press, 2002). pp. 33-46. See also Billy Golfus, "Sex and the Single Gimp," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis(New York: Routledge, 1997). pp. 419-28.

Some disabled activists appear to want the term disabled to mean something different from the normally accepted definition. Simi Linton uses the term 're-authoring' to describe the process whereby disabled people reclaim the word disability and fashion it to have another meaning. The drawback here is that whatever meaning disabled people want it to have may not be accepted by the rest of the population. People will still imagine their own definitions, those they have grown up with and become familiar with. Having said this it is true that words do acquire new meanings. The word 'retarded' has been deformed by the young into 'tard' as a term of abuse in much the same way that 'spastic' was used by an earlier generation. It is fortunate that the term 'cerebral palsy' does not lend itself so easily to corruption into slang.

Disabled activists have challenged both the terminology used to describe their condition and the restrictions such labels place on them because of their negative associations. Some, like Vic Finkelstein, have coined new terms to describe those who are able-bodied. Finkelstein calls those who do not need a wheelchair to get around 'the shoe-bound', a term which conveys the idea that such people are also limited.<sup>47</sup> Oliver uses the terms 'walkers', 'nearly-walkers' and 'non-walkers' in his chapter *Rehabilitating Society*.<sup>48</sup>

In some ways the debate about language and labels will never be settled. Language evolves all the time, and new terms are invented to meet the changing needs of the communities who invent them. Awareness of the clumsiness and failures of old terminology should help us to be more sensitive in future. In order to gain more understanding about the way language has evolved and changed we will now turn to the history of the disability movement to learn from the past.

## 2. A Brief History of the Disability Movement

Writing the history of anything poses the problem of where to start. When does history begin? In the case of the Disability Movement, the publication of the *Fundamental Principles of UPIAS*<sup>49</sup> in 1976 could be considered a key moment. This section looks first, however, at what led up to this event.

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<sup>47</sup> V Finkelstein, "Whose History???", <http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/finkelstein-whose-history.pdf>. p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> M Oliver, *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996). p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/UPIAS/fundamental%20principles.pdf> accessed on 18.11.10

## 2.1 Waves and developments

Colin Barnes summarises how Vic Finkelstein divides the history of the disability movement into three sections.<sup>50</sup>

- 1) The Feudal period, when there are cottage industries in which disabled people can be accommodated.
- 2) The Industrial revolution, when disabled people are segregated.
- 3) Liberation – only just beginning.

This outline has been criticised for being too simplistic and it is far from clear how the lives of disabled people were accommodated in the feudal period when life was generally much harsher for everyone than it is today. Even so, it is clear that the industrial revolution made productivity so important that anyone who could not pull their weight along with the rest would not have been able to work.

A more useful approach is to consider the various ways that disabled people have been regarded in the past. Len Barton argues that disabled people have been traditionally divided into three categories, those who are a menace and need to be institutionalised, those who are a burden and need to be eliminated in some way and those who are vulnerable and need to be protected.<sup>51</sup> Of course the institutionalisation of disabled people was not just because they were a menace, but also because it was genuinely felt that they would be better off cared for in a group setting. Families were often encouraged to put disabled children in an institution from an early age in the belief that the family would not be able to care for them.

## 2.2 Old and new models: Medical and Social

Prior to the seventies when the emergence of the social model changed the way disability is viewed, the medical model was the guiding principle when dealing with people with disabilities. The medical model views someone with a disability as a medical problem to be solved. Normal is seen as desirable, and steps are taken to render the person as normal as possible. Treatment would aim to get a person walking, perhaps with the aid of prosthetic limbs. The medical model had evolved, over the years since the two world wars, as a response to the number of soldiers returning from war with missing limbs, or in response to the great epidemics such as Polio which left significant numbers of people without full use of their limbs.

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<sup>50</sup> C. Barnes, "The Social Model of Disability: A Sociological Phenomenon Ignored by Sociologists," in *The Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. T. Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 1998). pp. 73-74.

<sup>51</sup> L. Barton, "Sociology, Disability Studies and Education: Some Observations," *ibid*.

The medical model was based on a presumed norm to which everyone should aspire. By taking a statistical approach it is clear that some people are going to be above average and others below. The only matter in question is how large the deviation from the norm has to be for the situation to be in need of treatment. The medical profession takes a scientific approach, is biologically deterministic, and regards each individual with a disability as a problem to be solved. People are usually treated in isolation, that is, their circumstances are not particularly relevant, as rehabilitation is assumed to mean getting the person capable of functioning in 'normal' society. A further aspect of the medical model is the quest for prevention, hence the development of systems of pre-natal screening and reproductive advice to those with genetic conditions.

The personal tragedy approach to disability, one which stems from the medical model, leaves disabled people feeling like victims, and isolated. This personal tragedy aspect of disability is something which major charities have tended to exploit in their fundraising projects. Fighting back, as Micheline Mason did in her account of throwing away the Lourdes holy water, is a way of regaining one's self-determination.<sup>52</sup> Another way is through the arts or politics. 'There are many routes to transforming personal into political consciousness. At the core, however, is a rejection of disability as personal tragedy.'<sup>53</sup>

The social model will be examined in more detail in the next section, but briefly the social model considers disability to be socially constructed and insists that disability should be separated from impairment. It is a situational, rather than dispositional model, which considers that the problems a disabled person has are not located within that person, but in the situation that surrounds them. The first thing to go with this model is the idea of personal tragedy. No wonder disabled people, once they heard about it, were keen to embrace this new way of thinking. Instead of being pitied, and patronised, they demanded emancipation. The social model brought about transformation and liberation which is sometimes likened to the changes that took place during the rise of the Civil Rights movement, or of women's liberation in the decades before.

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<sup>52</sup> Mason describes how a moment of personal epiphany came for her when she was able to reject the offer of a miracle cure for her condition. Her story is told in Chapter 6 of J Campbell and M Oliver, *Disability Politics: Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future* (Routledge, 1996). pp. 105-124.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

### 2.3 Legislation

The second chapter of Campbell and Oliver's *Disability Politics* looks at the legislative framework, which includes the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (1944), the Education Act (1944), the National Health Services Act (1948) and the National Assistance Act (1948). These were supposed to offer 'cradle to grave' care for all, but for disabled people the liberation promised did not come. In the 60s they were still mostly confined to institutions or living with their families who struggled to provide for their needs. Gradually disabled activists began to campaign for their rights, for emancipation, for legislation which would truly make them equal to their able-bodied peers.

The first Disability Discrimination Act in the UK was passed in 1995, and has been followed by several amendments. In 2005 a new DDA was passed and this has since been largely replaced by the Equality Act of 2010, though some parts of the DDA still apply.<sup>54</sup> Some definitions of what the Act considers to be 'disabilities' are given. People who have a physical or mental impairment are included, while those who suffer from pyromania or addiction to illegal substances are not included.

### 2.4 Activism

There is a theory of group behaviour which says that, as they develop, groups go through four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to see how the development of disabled people's activist groups has followed this pathway.

The first stage is when the group is still forming, trying to decide which issues to tackle, fixing priorities, and establishing ground-rules. In the 50s and 60s, when the Medical model ruled, and there was a slow-burning anger about the way disabled people were being treated, organisations to help disabled people were of several types. Some were run by disabled people themselves, such as the DDA.<sup>56</sup> Others were major name charities, such as RNIB, parents' organisations, such as MENCAP and what are known as single impairment charities, whose main aim, in many cases, was trying to find a cure.<sup>57</sup> Davis says that

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<sup>54</sup> For details of the 2005 DDA see <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/13/contents> and for the 2010 Equality Act see [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG\\_4001068](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068) [accessed 2.11.13.]

<sup>55</sup> Bruce Tuckman. [http://www.freewebs.com/group-management/BruceTuckman\(1\).pdf](http://www.freewebs.com/group-management/BruceTuckman(1).pdf) accessed 12.12.10

<sup>56</sup> Disabled Drivers Association.

<sup>57</sup> Examples include the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Muscular Dystrophy Society and what was then known as the Spastics Society, now re-named SCOPE.

The first wave of any struggle involves the establishment of the identity against the societal definitions that were formed largely by oppression. [...] The first phase also implies a pulling together of forces, an agreement to agree for political ends and group solidarity, along with the tacit approval of an agenda for the establishment of basic rights and prohibitions against various kinds of discrimination and ostracism.<sup>58</sup>

The early years of the disability movement were predominantly years of struggle carried out by people with physical disabilities. The key players in the early movement in the UK, Paul Hunt<sup>59</sup>, Mike Oliver, Vic Finkelstein, Jane Campbell, Mairian Corker, Jenny Morris, were all people who had the intellectual and academic capabilities to fight the battles that needed fighting and to champion the cause of disabled people. In the early years the fight was often one that centred on accessibility, both of buildings and institutions in the wider sense. There were struggles over housing, and benefits, to make it possible for disabled people to leave the confines of institutions and strike out on their own, with greater autonomy and choice about where and how they led their lives.

When considering the emergence of the disability movement, Campbell and Oliver<sup>60</sup> mention that it was often single-issues that brought people together. Employment was one, mobility another, accessibility a third. The attitudes of paternalistic charities were widely condemned. Campaigns might have been for disabled toilets, for example. The storming stage came when there were arguments about what should be the priority for campaigns. There was some jostling for position, some in-fighting and some disagreement about the priorities. Some people also tried to reform existing organisations from within, but such efforts were largely unsuccessful. The arrival of the BCODP (British Council of Disabled People) signalled the beginning of lobbying for employment opportunities and benefits. There were objections to the fact that it was able-bodied people who were running everything. In contrast BCODP was a grassroots organisation, with a lack of funds, where there was tension between individual goals and collective ones, but an overall agreement that the social model was the key to development.

Norming began when people started to recognise the possibilities that opened up once the social model was applied to disability. The social model arose when disabled people started

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<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Bending over Backwards : Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*. p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Many regard Paul Hunt, who at one point wrote a letter which was published in the Guardian, as one of the first disabled activists.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell and Oliver, *Disability Politics: Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future*.

to challenge the prevailing assumptions that their disabilities, and the problems they suffered, were caused by their impairments. Instead it is society that constructs barriers which prevent disabled people from functioning as they would like and not the impairments that they suffer. As Davis remarks, 'Impairment is the physical fact of lacking an arm or a leg. Disability is the social process that turns an impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access.'<sup>61</sup> There were areas of uncertainty, such as the degree of political involvement and whether they should ally themselves with one party or aim for cross-party support. There were some notable mass demonstrations, such as the one at Elephant and Castle in 1988 and protests about the Telethon.<sup>62</sup>

A common feature of these early activists was that they were mostly middle-class and well-educated. They had voices and they used them effectively to promote equality, to break down barriers and to challenge existing structures, including those of the large charities who until that time had been predominantly run by able-bodied people who adopted a somewhat paternalistic approach towards the people they were supposed to be representing. For these people the social model served them well, opened doors, provided explanations for their exclusion from society and gave them the rationale for challenging prevailing assumptions. If the only obstacle to be overcome was lack of wheelchair access then, given enough money and some structural changes, there were no adequate reasons why a disabled person should not be able to go anywhere they chose.

Once the main areas to be tackled had been established the performing stage was reached. Two key movements in those days were the Disability Alliance (DA) and the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). Some were inspired by what they learnt of the Centres for Independent Living (CIL) in the USA. In conclusion it can be argued that the two most influential factors in forming the disability movement were

1. Disabled people recognised that they were not beginning to enjoy the affluence that the rest of Britain was experiencing from the 60s.
2. Residential homes were not giving any freedom to their residents.

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<sup>61</sup> Davis, *Bending over Backwards : Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*. p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Disabled activists were against the Telethon because it emphasised personal tragedy, something that they felt belonged in the past. The Elephant and Castle protest, organised by the BCODP, involved a sit-in near the DHSS head-office. Disabled people sat on the ground, or parked their wheelchairs, blocking the road, as a protest because the Minister for the Disabled refused to see them. There had been cuts to the income of disabled people as a result of the 1988 Social Security Act.



As mentioned before, it was dissatisfaction with both party politics and existing charities, coupled with the influence of the Civil Rights movement, that helped to galvanise the disability movement in the early days. Key issues included a critique of state-based and voluntary-sector-based welfare provision, struggles for independent living, campaigns against discrimination, a rise of self-help initiatives and challenges to existing negative stereotypes.

## 2.5 Current trends and tendencies

Simi Linton devotes a chapter in her book, *Claiming Disability*<sup>63</sup>, to trying to reclaim the study of disability back from academia where she feels it has been marginalised. Linton objects, amongst other things, to the way disabled people are objectified by academic researchers, probably in order to remain free from subjectivity and to maintain scientific rigour. She also feels that the academic world is too close to the medical one, with its overemphasis on intervention, treatment, prevention and cure. Academia sees disability as a problem to be solved, leading to the favouring of deterministic explanations.

Although, thanks to the social model, the academic world inspired the disability movement, Campbell and Oliver observe, 'At this point in our history, the adequacy of the social model is being questioned by disabled people themselves.'<sup>64</sup> It seems important not to cling to the social model if it has outlived its usefulness. According to Tom Shakespeare, rejecting the social model does not mean an end to political activism, however. What Shakespeare does not like about the social model is its insistence on dichotomous distinctions, e.g. social v medical (individual), impairment v disability. He considers other models, such as the Minority Group model, which has been developed particularly in N America, and the Nordic relational model may offer useful alternatives. This latter considers a disability as 'a mismatch between the individual and the environment,'<sup>65</sup> takes into account the situational aspects (e.g. a blind person is not disabled while they are listening to the radio) and most important that 'a disability is relative, a continuum rather than a dichotomy.'<sup>66</sup> These dichotomies are just labels, and instead Shakespeare recommends moving 'beyond dichotomous binaries of nature/culture, body/mind and impairment/disability.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Linton, *Claiming Disability : Knowledge and Identity*.

<sup>64</sup> Campbell and Oliver, *Disability Politics: Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future*. p. 145.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*(Routledge, 2006). p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>67</sup> H. Meekosha, "Body Battles: Bodies, Gender and Disability," in *The Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. T. Shakespeare(London: Bloomsbury, 1998). p. 163.

Power struggles were a feature of the early days of the disabled movement. These were between the existing order, governed by able-bodied people and an ableist society, and the emerging voices of disabled activists. Now the power struggles are somewhat different. There is a struggle to find the balance of power between academia and grass-roots disability activism. There are disagreements about the usefulness and relevance of the social model to the disabled movement. There is also a concern about the location of power in the new wave of independent living. Each of these will be considered in turn, in an attempt to look at current trends and tendencies.

Independent living is sometimes proposed as the way forward but this is not without its problems. In Part 3 of a book by Shelley Tremain<sup>68</sup> there is a chapter entitled ‘Supported Living and the Production of Individuals’ by Chris Drinkwater who asks ‘What new forms of power are at play in the new practices of inclusive living?’<sup>69</sup> He seems to be implying that we now demonise the old institutions, and embrace care in the community, but that too has its problems. Foucault observed that power arrangements had changed as in this table:<sup>70</sup>

Old style	Modern style
Sovereign power	ubiquitous power which has no centre
top-down	bottom up
juridical	distributed around a norm
negative	positive and productive
a power to deduct and seize	highly specified and localised

What this appears to mean is that although, on the surface, a disabled person living independently has taken control of their life, in reality they are still not in control. Drinkwater looks at how power relations operate in supported living. The goal of support is to make people behave in conforming ways. If they do this they will be able to fit into society better. The term he uses here is social role valorization (SRV) which in a sense means valuing the social position of people. ‘Valued behaviours are commended; non valued behaviours, if not exactly punished, must be seen by the service user to be associated with undesired outcomes.

<sup>68</sup> Shelley Tremain, *Foucault and the Government of Disability* (University of Michigan Press, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> C Drinkwater, "Supported Living and the Production of Individuals," *Foucault and the government of disability* (2005). p. 230.

<sup>70</sup> Adapted from *ibid.* p.230.

At the least, service users must be made aware that their actions produce *consequences*. This is what it is to learn the meaning of responsibility.’<sup>71</sup>

It would seem that people with disabilities are still kept in states of disadvantage, even when, on the surface, they appear to have equality with the able-bodied. The disability movement has come a long way since the early days. Disabled people have their voice heard as of right, and can exercise more freedom of choice than ever before. Nevertheless there are still battles to be fought and campaigns for equality of opportunity, particularly when it comes to employment, are still necessary.

### 3. Disability and social constructionism

In the previous section we encountered the social model as a challenge to the medical one. The social model has been so pervasive in disability studies in recent years that it requires a more detailed examination of the theory and its implications. The excursus into the topic of mental and cognitive disability is to provide a rationale for later parts of this work, when the theological aspects of people with such disabilities are discussed.

#### 3.1 Contextualising disability

The degree of difficulty a disabled person experiences depends on their circumstances. For example, in a busy, noisy environment those who rely on aural communication are disabled while those use sign language can communicate just as easily irrespective of the level of background noise. Disability is a product of complex interactions between a person and their environment. One way to consider such complexity is through Postmodernism. Titchkosky endorses the need for a postmodern take on disability because it allows for the variety of people’s experiences and for their transient nature to be interpreted. ‘The postmodern turn, with its focus on the uncertain and ambiguous character of social life and identity, allows for uncovering interpretive relations that lie at the heart of making up the meaning of disabled people.’<sup>72</sup> A similar idea is expressed by Davis and Watson, who favour a ‘rejection of meta-narratives and general theories in favour of an emphasis on local narratives and piecemeal and contingent understandings’.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 233.

<sup>72</sup> Titchkosky, "Cultural Maps: Which Way to Disability?." p. 110.

<sup>73</sup> J Davis and N Watson, "Countering Stereotypes of Disability: Disabled Children and Resistance," *ibid.* p. 160.

Postmodernism has also led to the acceptance that through complexity rather than simplicity is the understanding of disability to be found. Corker and Shakespeare say that ‘What postmodern ideas have noted, however, is that people’s lives are far more complex than modernism likes to believe and that they choose to engage with this complexity.’<sup>74</sup> They acknowledge that this means that it is difficult to explain disability in simple language that everyone can understand, something which has led to many disabled people criticising the academic community for obscuring their lives in complex jargon. Indeed the relationship between professional academics who write about disability and disabled people themselves has sometimes been a fraught one.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.2 The social model

The social model is the view that disability is socially constructed. One key idea of this model involves making a distinction between disability and impairment. Lennard Davis in *Bending Over Backwards* explains how the social model shows that impairment becomes disability because of the barriers society throws up. He also points out how categories we once thought of as fixed turn out not to be, such as race, which cannot be genetically defined. Even gender is more malleable than was previously thought as we can see from transgendered people. Ethnicity is another one without fixed boundaries and so we see all these things as part of a continuum, just as disability is. He says that ‘What we are discussing is the instability of the category of disability as a subset of the instability of identity in a postmodern era.’<sup>76</sup>

Key assumptions of the social constructionist view are that the problems disabled people face are due to society not accommodating their needs properly, that barrier removal will prevent impairment from becoming a disability and that changes to society will restore people with impairments to their rightful positions as equals of those without impairments. When this model was first proposed it was received with great enthusiasm by the disability community. As time has gone by, however, it appears that the social model has not been able to deliver every impaired person from their disabilities. Reasons for this are explored in the following section where the social model is critiqued.

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<sup>74</sup> M. Corker and T. Shakespeare, *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*(Continuum Intl Pub Group, 2002). p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> For a clear and useful account of some different aspects of the debate about suitable research methodologies see Geof Mercer’s article ‘From Critique to Practice: emancipatory disability research’ <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/Barnes/implementing%20the%20social%20model%20-%20chapter%208.pdf> [accessed 2.11.13.]

<sup>76</sup> Davis, *Bending over Backwards : Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*. p. 25.

### 3.3 Critique of the social model

Criticisms of the social model can be grouped together under three headings; the false dichotomy issue, ethnocentrism and the need for a more eclectic approach. These will be considered in turn, followed by two suggestions for alternative models, namely Resistance theory and the Limits model.

Shakespeare asserts that previous attempts to define disability have been reductionist, citing cultural, biological and economic reductionism as being present. In reality, disability is ‘an interaction between individual and structural factors.’<sup>77</sup> He argues against thinking of disability solely in terms of oppression and barriers. The continuum and the interaction, these are essential parts of the whole. The interactionist approach takes into account the personal factors that the social model overlooks or ignores. ‘Impairment is not the end of the world, tragic and pathological. But neither is it irrelevant, or just another difference.’<sup>78</sup>

David Wasserman is another writer who favours an interactionist approach when it comes to explaining the causes of disability. He says that ‘the limitations associated with impairment are a joint product of biological features, environmental factors, and personal goals.’<sup>79</sup> This would suggest that both the Medical model and the Social model have useful contributions to make and that it is a mistake to pitch them both in opposition to each other. Further he argues that it is ‘preferable to reject the false dichotomy between biology and society as *the cause* of disability and to break the link between causation and responsibility – to hold society responsible for the alleviation of disadvantage, whether it can be said to have caused it or not.’<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile Carol Thomas acknowledges that there is no clear distinction between impairments and their effects when she comments that ‘In any one life, impairment effects and disability interlock in unique and complex ways.’<sup>81</sup>

Simi Linton is particularly critical of the way some approaches to disability have concentrated on polar opposites. ‘Disability studies introduces contradiction into the polarized categories of weak and strong, normal and abnormal, revered and reviled, dependent and independent, expendable and essential. It reveals these as false dichotomies,

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<sup>77</sup> Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. p. 55.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>79</sup> D Wasserman, "Philosophical Issues in the Definition and Social Response to Disability," in *Handbook of Disability Studies*, ed. G L Albrecht, Seelman, K D, & Bury, M(Sage, 2001). p. 225.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

<sup>81</sup> C Thomas, "Developing the Social Relational in the Social Model of Disability: A Theoretical Agenda," ed. Colin Barnes & Geoff Mercer(Leeds: The Disability Press, 2004). p. 42.

and reveals the epistemological underpinnings of the privileged position in each pair.<sup>82</sup> Here she is commenting that not only are such false dichotomies unhelpful, they also further marginalise the disabled person by personifying them in the inferior position.

In their book, *Disability Discourse*, Mairian Corker and Sally French advocate discourse as the key to integrating the two separated ideas of disability and impairment.<sup>83</sup> They comment that the social model is based on the idea of opposites, which never meet. Instead in this book they try to bring the two parts together again. Susan Gabel identifies, in a chapter of this book, some problems with current disability discourses. One is that the focus on physical impairment ignores those whose impairments are invisible. Second is that by thinking of disability as socially constructed you ignore the individual aspects. She says that disability is not just something done to someone from the outside. She says we should regard 'discourse as the construction of meaning, experience as the impetus for discourse, and the body as the medium through which discourse flows through experience to meaning.'<sup>84</sup> This indicates how integration and interaction are essential features of a model, rather than polarisation and isolation caused when disabled people are placed at the far end of a continuum, at the periphery of normality.

Another criticism of the social model has been its ethnocentrism. John Swain points out that disabled people experience their impairments in very different ways, depending on their environment. He points out that 'The social model of disability was born from the experiences of disabled people in the Western minority world.'<sup>85</sup> Some interesting observations of how disability is viewed in non-Western societies are given from other researchers, such as Anita Ghai, an Indian researcher, who observes that 'In a culture where pain and suffering are often accepted as karma (fate) and learned helplessness becomes a life trait, consideration of disability as a social issue is a difficult goal.'<sup>86</sup> Ghai also points out the strong influence of poverty in India as a cause of disability. 'In developing countries like India, impairment is largely caused by poverty. The prevalence of impairment, particularly

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<sup>82</sup> Linton, *Claiming Disability : Knowledge and Identity*. p. 185-186.

<sup>83</sup> M. Corker and S. French, *Disability Discourse*(McGraw-Hill, 1999).

<sup>84</sup> S. Gabel, "Depressed and Disabled: Some Discursive Problems with Mental Illness," in *Disability Discourse*, ed. M. Corker and S. French(McGraw-Hill, 1999). p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> J Swain, *Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environments*(Sage Publications Ltd, 2004). p.54.

<sup>86</sup> A Ghai, "3 Marginalisation and Disability: Experiences from the Third World," *Disability and the life course: Global perspectives* (2001). p. 35.

polio and blindness, is at least four times higher among those who are below the poverty line than those who are above it.<sup>87</sup>

In the conclusion to his book, Shakespeare pleads for a more eclectic, open approach in disability studies, saying that ‘Rather than being restricted by social model orthodoxy, disability studies should be pluralist, valuing analytical rigour and open debate.’<sup>88</sup> Such pluralism would be supported by Tobin Siebers who uses the Theory of Complex Embodiment as a means of illustrating the advantages of taking an interactionist view of disability.<sup>89</sup> Supporters of the social model have always criticised the medical model for placing too much emphasis on the body, whilst the social model can be criticised for ignoring the body. A more balanced, although more complex, view would consider all aspects of embodiment.

Susan Gabel also calls for eclecticism as an alternative to the social model. ‘Conceptual frameworks that encourage fluid ways of interpreting disability experiences and various critiques of the strong social model suggest that the social model, itself, may be replaced at some point in the future.’<sup>90</sup> One alternative is called resistance theory which is more flexible. Resistance is something that has been there all the time, resistance to the medical model, to stigma, and other forms of oppression. Resistance, she argues is ‘a multilevel, multidimensional dialectic within which there is push and pull, give and take, deconstruction/reconstruction between players at all levels of the social world.’<sup>91</sup>

In her book about Theology and Disability, Beth Creamer has a chapter entitled Limits and Disability Theology which takes a third route, discarding what is insufficient from the medical and social models. The Limits model suggests first that limits are ‘an *unsurprising* characteristic of humanity.’<sup>92</sup> Second it says ‘that limits are an *intrinsic* aspect of human existence – part of what it means to be human.’<sup>93</sup> Thirdly there is an implication ‘that limits are *good* or, at the very least, not evil.’<sup>94</sup> One section, on ‘Interpreting Deafness,’ looks at Deaf identity and how the Deaf community challenges many conventional ideas about disability. By considering deafness it is possible to see how the limits model can be used to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>88</sup> Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. p. 198.

<sup>89</sup> Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*(University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> SL Gabel, *Disability Studies in Education: Readings in Theory and Method*(Peter Lang Pub Inc, 2005). p. 7.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>92</sup> Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*. p. 93.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p.94.

re-examine notions of disability. Yes, deaf people are limited as they cannot, for example, hear a fire alarm, or order food from a drive-in facility. But hearing people are limited, too, in that they cannot communicate with each other across a crowded room, neither can they lip-read what people are saying when out of earshot.

### 3.4 A critical evaluation

The social model made an outstanding contribution to the disability movement at a time when new paradigms were much needed. The rise of the disability movement was facilitated by the new way of thinking about disability and impairment that came about as a result of the derivation of the social model. Postmodernism also made it possible to move away from the dogmatic, scientific approach of the medical model, enabling both academics and disabled activists to imagine new ways of being, new ways of living their lives.

The impact of the social model, however, has been restricted largely to academic circles. Most disabled people have not heard of the social model. It has had little impact on the ordinary everyday problems faced by disabled people. Transport and buildings may now be more accessible than they were fifty years ago, but huge inequalities still exist in the areas of employment and since this is so closely linked to economic independence, disabled people are still far more likely to live below the poverty line than their non-disabled peers.

Another weakness of social constructionist explanations of disability is their determinist view that disability has a single cause. Biological determinism has dominated the medical model while environmental determinism is the main pillar of the social model. Both explanations have a tendency to ignore the place of free will in people's lives. Research which uses case studies can often highlight this as reading about the individual lives of disabled people who have made their own choices about how to respond to their impairments is a good way to dispel the idea that the consequences of a particular impairment are inevitable. The next generation of disabled activists are only just beginning their journeys and it will be interesting to see how their stories unfold in the coming decades. Further mention of the use of case studies will be made in the next section.

### Excursus: Mental Illness, Cognitive Impairment and Intellectual Disabilities

#### Introduction: Motivation and clarification of terms

The terms 'mental illness', 'cognitive impairment' and 'intellectual disabilities' are not interchangeable. Nevertheless members of these groups share similar problems, such as



marginalisation, and for that reason they will be considered together here. There are challenges for faith communities when dealing with marginalised people. It is the recognition of these challenges, and the response to them, that will be considered in this section and in later parts of this work.

There is a tendency to objectify the disability, by focusing on the observable effects it has, something which means we overlook the subjective experience. This is why first person accounts of disability can be very useful as they bring the subjective experiences of the disabled person into the understanding of those who do not have that disability, or that impairment. Accounts, such as that of Teresa de Cartagena<sup>95</sup> of her deafness, can show us that there can be advantages, as well as disadvantages, from being disabled. In her world of silence Teresa comes closer to God, is removed from the clamour and confusion of the world, and can appreciate the inner dialogue between herself and her creator. Those of us who endure the hustle and bustle of modern life can, at times, envy Teresa the silence of her cell.

Jesus was drawn to those on the margins of society. In his day they were lepers and tax-collectors. In our day they are people with mental illnesses and intellectual impairments. The challenge for those who work within faith communities is how to recognise and welcome those who are isolated because of their cognitive impairments or their abnormal mental states. The work of Jean Vanier and the L'Arche communities will be considered in more detail in a later chapter, but this section aims to explore some of the challenges of applying the Social Constructionist view to those whose impairments are not physical but mental.

The insights from accounts of faith experiences of those with cognitive impairments can be gained from personal stories; for example, Beth Porter has written about her experience while working at a L'Arche community where one of the residents was Jewish. Once she had got to know this lady, Ellen, she decided to take her to the Synagogue. In order to find the right place Beth visited three synagogues to see what they were like before she took Ellen with her. Here is how she describes their first visit:

The first service Ellen and I attended together strongly confirmed my intuition to take her to a synagogue. It had a strikingly transformative effect on Ellen. As we entered the sanctuary, the congregation was chanting the Shema, "Hear, O Israel..." (the Jewish declaration of faith), and Ellen stood still, spellbound. Then, suddenly transformed, she took the lead: all her body language announced that this was her territory; she belonged and I was the visitor.

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<sup>95</sup> Teresa de Cartagena and D Seidenspinner-Núñez, *The Writings of Teresa De Cartagena* (DS Brewer, 1998).

Proudly she walked up the aisle and chose our seats, as near to the front as possible.<sup>96</sup>

She goes on to describe how, through regular attendance at Synagogue, Ellen reached the point where she was able to 'learn by heart parts of the familiar Hebrew chants and to contribute her thoughts to discussions of the Torah readings.'<sup>97</sup> Ellen liked to be involved and became restless if she had to sit at the back because it was a very large service. By consulting others in the community, Beth was able to make sure that Ellen attended the type of service that would best be suited to her needs. The community was able to put Ellen down for specific roles so that she would be fully involved in what was going on. The story of Ellen's Bat Mitzvah is very heart warming, especially as it describes the lengths her family, friends, and community were prepared to go to in order to support this project. In this story it was not just Ellen who benefitted from the community's response to her needs. The faith community and Ellen's home community both gained from the whole experience. Subsequently another person with intellectual disabilities went on to complete their Bat Mitzvah and Ellen shared in the preparation for this.

### Marginalisation

The happy story of Ellen is, unfortunately, not typical for many people with cognitive impairments. Such people have often been marginalised not only from faith communities but also from academic attention. Just as those with physical disabilities can see that their state might be considered to have been socially constructed, so the same can be said of cognitive disabilities. Creamer observes that academics have largely ignored those with cognitive impairment, however. 'Even in the wealth of recent works on disability studies, we see little mention of cognitive disabilities other than histories of institutionalization and sterilization.'<sup>98</sup> Furthermore she comments that 'models of disability have failed to engage or reflect upon cognitive disabilities in relation to disability studies.'<sup>99</sup>

Creamer also remarks on the way cognitively impaired people have been excluded from the process of liberation that the social model has brought to those suffering from physical

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<sup>96</sup> B Porter, "L'Arche Daybreak: An Example of Interfaith Ministry among People with Developmental Disabilities," *Journal of pastoral care* 52, no. 2 (1998). p. 159.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 159.

<sup>98</sup> Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*. p. 104.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

impairments. In examining the reasons for the exclusion of those with cognitive deficits she argues that for disability scholars this

is an issue that is foreign (we do not see people with cognitive disabilities in the academy), threatening (it raises significant ethical and philosophical questions about the nature and characteristics of humanity), and even frightening (especially for those of us who love our intellectual abilities). Within a discourse dominated by intellectual and academic rigour, it is hard to know where an entry point for the cognitively disabled may appear.<sup>100</sup>

Two feminist writers, Pamela Cushing and Tanya Lewis, who conducted an ethnographic study of relationships in L'Arche homes, explain some of the reasons for the exclusion of those with intellectual disabilities.

People who live with intellectual disability embody social, political, and economic marginalization because of their deviation from the dominant cultural values. While many groups face such discrimination, people with intellectual disabilities are often less able to resist these dominant forces in developing a life of their own choosing. Their personal resources are limited in a society that demands a level of intellectual reasoning and verbal expression of which many are not capable.<sup>101</sup>

They also discuss some of the difficulties faced by researchers in this area which may account for Creamer's observation that those with cognitive impairment have been ignored by academics. With reference to their particular study, which was of women in L'Arche homes in Toronto, they explain that

While various circumstances indicate that the women with intellectual disabilities also find this environment and these relations mutual and fruitful, it is difficult to document this in written format given the complex blend of kinaesthetics, facial expressions, moods, and other responses that constitute the empirical basis of interpreting their experiences taken together over time.<sup>102</sup>

Peter Beresford, in a chapter entitled 'Madness, Distress, Research and a Social Model', observes that mental health service users have not been central to the disability movement.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

<sup>101</sup> P Cushing and T Lewis, "Negotiating Mutuality and Agency in Care Giving Relationships with Women with Intellectual Disabilities," *Hypatia* 17, no. 3 (2002). p. 174.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p.175.

He discusses what he refers to as the survivor movement, where a survivor is someone who has survived being a user of psychiatric services. The Mental Health Service User Survivor movement is a recent entry to the whole disability debate. It is encouraging to note that there is a dominance of partnership approaches, rather than separatism in mental health. Behind the mental health survivor movement Beresford identifies that there are 'worries about signing up to any kind of monolithic theory'<sup>103</sup> and that these concerns lead to what amounts to an unorthodox approach which rejects being pigeon-holed. Under the heading of social approaches and mental health survivors he says there has been a twin emphasis on mutual aid and campaigning for change.

### Mental illness, intellectual impairment and social issues

As has already been remarked, there has been very little in academic literature which relates the social model to people with learning disabilities.<sup>104</sup> One reason for this may be that in disability studies there has been a focus on the body. Where those with intellectual impairment *are* included in the literature it is sometimes only to draw attention to the difficulties they pose. In this respect there has been a particular concern about the sexuality of people with learning difficulties, as sometimes they are stereotyped as sexually promiscuous and therefore dangerous.<sup>105</sup> Another problem relates to a focus on barrier removal and the idea that impairment is not the problem. Removal of barriers is fine when you are talking about wheelchair access. But how do you remove the barriers for someone who is intellectually disabled? The third problem is that people with learning difficulties have not had their stories told. Personal histories of those with physical impairments abound, but for those with intellectual impairments being heard has not been so easy.

There have been some attempts, however, to apply the social model to mental illness and Susan Gabel, writing as an academic who suffers from depression, identifies some problems with current disability discourses. One is that the focus on physical impairment ignores those whose impairments are invisible. Second is that by thinking of disability as socially constructed you ignore the individual aspects.

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<sup>103</sup> P Beresford, "Madness, Distress, Research and a Social Model," in *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research*, ed. Colin Barnes & Geof Mercer (Leeds: The Disability Press, 2004). p. 213.

<sup>104</sup> A.L. Chappell, "Still out in the Cold: People with Learning Difficulties and the Social Model of Disability," in *The Disability Reader. Social Science Perspectives*, ed. T. Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 1998).

<sup>105</sup> This is in contrast to physically disabled people who are often stereotyped as asexual. The article by Billy Golfus is a notable exception. Golfus, "Sex and the Single Gimp."

Wilson and Beresford put forward a strong case for the view that mental illness is socially constructed. They ask, 'from where does psychiatry gain its continuing authority? What forces are helping it to persist in the face of the very contrary concerns of Postmodernity?'<sup>106</sup> They argue that mental illness is socially constructed, and pursue three threads:

1. The dominant psychiatric interpretations of madness.
2. Popular media interpretations of madness.
3. The conceptualisations of psychiatric system survivors.

They posit that there is a continuum of distress and well-being and that our position on this is not fixed. They argue that mental health professionals construct madness by means of their procedures and systems of classification, etc. Documentation, mental records, are cited as evidence of mental illness. From such records, stereotypes are created. It would seem that the stickiness of labels has not diminished since Rosenhan's study.

Further support for the idea that mental illness might be socially constructed can be found in a study of voice-hearing by Lis-Bodil Karlsson who proposes two alternative ways of regarding this phenomenon. The first, what might be called the traditional view, is to say that the voices are auditory hallucinations and one of the symptoms of schizophrenia. This would be the classic medical view. An alternative, however, is 'to acknowledge the hearing of voices as being context-contingent. The experience and interpretation of voice hearing is, in other words, seen as being dependent on cultural and social processes.'<sup>107</sup> This view is explored in the study in which people who experience voice-hearing explain and describe and understand their voices. The author explains that 'hearing voices in itself is not an indication of a psychiatric disease, but that the inability to cope with hearing voices is disabling. Currently, there is a shift in what is considered normal versus deviant with respect to voice hearing.'<sup>108</sup> This is a clear example of the difference between the impairment (hearing voices) and the disability that impairment causes.

Historically voice-hearing has not always been regarded in such a negative way as it is today. Bettina Thraenhardt points out that

Although such experiences are heavily stigmatized today, many famous thinkers, poets, artists and scholars of earlier times described hearing voices: a wise demon spoke to Socrates, the saints emboldened Joan of Arc, and an angel addressed Rainer

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<sup>106</sup> Wilson and Beresford, "Madness, Distress and Postmodernity: Putting the Record Straight." p. 143.

<sup>107</sup> LB Karlsson, "'More Real Than Reality': A Study of Voice Hearing," *International Journal of Social Welfare* 17, no. 4 (2008). p. 365.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 366.

Maria Rilke, inspiring his *Duino Elegies*. The list goes on: Carl Gustav Jung, Andy Warhol, Galileo, Pythagoras, William Blake, Winston Churchill, Robert Schumann and Gandhi, among others, have all reportedly heard voices.<sup>109</sup>

This illustrates how one phenomenon can be regarded as a dangerous sign of a serious psychotic illness or something far less sinister, if not something welcome, in different circumstances. Thraenhardt also observes that cultural variations have been found in the occurrence of hallucinations.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4. Disability discourse and theology

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? (John 9:1-2)

This question contains within several ideas that persist in discussions about disability and theology. Perhaps it is the duty of theology to ask difficult or challenging questions, even if sometimes they cannot be answered. The answer that Jesus gave ('Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life' John 9:3) was not the one his listeners expected and itself raises further questions. This section contains more questions than answers, but at a later stage in this work it is hoped that some of them will be addressed.

##### 4.1 Key Themes

*First theme – we have a duty to care for our brothers and sisters who are disabled*

The duty to care for the weak goes beyond mere obligation. Those who are weak call forth abilities and talents from the strong that enrich their own lives. This is particularly well expressed by Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche.

People who are powerless and vulnerable attract what is most beautiful and most luminous in those who are stronger: they call them to be compassionate, to love intelligently, and not only in a sentimental way. Those who are weak help those who are more capable to discover their humanity and to leave the world of competition in order to put their energies at the service of love,

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<sup>109</sup> B Thraenhardt, "Hearing Voices," *Scientific American Mind* 17, no. 6 (2006). p. 76.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 78. 'The occurrence of hallucinations varies with age and race, according to a survey of the public in England and Wales. Louise C. Johns of the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London and her colleagues reviewed data from 2,867 whites and 5,196 members of minority ethnic groups. Hallucinations were most common among teens in the white sample but among those in their 20s and 50s in the Caribbean group. In the South Asian sample, prevalence varied only very little by age. Overall, 4 percent of whites reported hearing or seeing things. In comparison, rates were 2.5 times higher among Caribbeans and half as much among South Asians.' LC Johns and J van Os, "The Continuity of Psychotic Experiences in the General Population," *Clinical Psychology Review* 21, no. 8 (2001).

justice and peace. The weak teach the strong to accept and integrate the weakness and brokenness of their own lives which they often hide behind masks.<sup>111</sup>

Stanley Hauerwas, speaking of ways of caring for children with cognitive impairment, warns of the dangers of 'normalisation' whereby we try to treat the disabled child as if they were normal. This can be done for the understandable reason of trying not to deny the disabled child a normal experience, as it were denying them their rights. The opposite danger, however, is that in so doing we make the disabled person conform to our ideas of normality, even though this may not be right for them. He considers it is especially important, when caring for the disabled child, not to be over-protective. We need to

have the confidence that the destiny of retarded children is not finally in our hands – that they and we are both sustained by a power beyond our capacity. In the presence of such a power we have the grounds for taking the risk of caring for the retarded exactly because their existence and ours are called forth by the God we have come to know in the history of Israel and the cross of Christ.<sup>112</sup>

Later he states that 'we are sustained by service to God who asks nothing more from us than to be his people who continue to have time in the business of this world to have children, even if they are retarded.'<sup>113</sup>

One of the foremost Jewish scholars is Maimonides, and he used the term feeble-minded to describe those we would now call intellectually disabled. He said that though their testimony was not acceptable in court, they were still nevertheless human beings and deserving of the same protection and support as any other human being.<sup>114</sup> There is advice in the Talmud about the education of children and about what to do with those who have learning difficulties. The obligation is that all children should be taught, regardless of their capabilities. There are stories in the Talmud of remarkable teachers who never gave up trying to teach even the least able students, even to the point of telling them something four-hundred times. There are also instructions in the Talmud about class size and that for 'normal'

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<sup>111</sup> J Vanier, *The Scandal of Service: Jesus Washes Our Feet* (Novalis, 1996). p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 8, no. 3-4 (2005). p. 158.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>114</sup> M Morad, Y Nasri, and J Merrick, "Islam and the Person with Intellectual Disability," *ibid.* 5, no. 2 (2001).

children the Primary school class size should be twenty-five but for those with learning disabilities a class size of eight would be more appropriate.<sup>115</sup>

Some Jewish authorities, such as Rabbi Daniel Nevins, have given thought and voice to the rubrics surrounding participation in the Jewish community of people with disabilities. 'In contrast to many ancient societies which scorned and persecuted people with disabilities, Judaism has taught us to see the infinite worth of human life and to preserve the safety and dignity of all people. One measure of a person's dignity is the extent to which he or she is included in the ritual expectations of his or her community.'<sup>116</sup> This article suggests that mechanisms exist to permit blind Jews to participate fully in, and even to lead, Jewish services.<sup>117</sup>

An article by Mohammed Morad outlines the way Islam has regarded people with intellectual disabilities as deserving of care and support. 'Caring for the disabled is the duty of every Moslem and every Islamic state and society. Empathy, human rights protection and holistic care for this population deserves a social and economic investment.'<sup>118</sup>

### *Second theme – we are all wounded*

We all suffer. We live in imperfect bodies which cause us pain. We have imperfect minds which cause a different kind of pain. We are human. When Davis argues that 'Impairment is the rule, and normalcy is the fantasy. Dependence is the reality, and independence grandiose thinking',<sup>119</sup> he is echoing a frequently repeated idea that we are all disabled in some way. We certainly all depend on large amounts of modern technology to enable us to lead our 21<sup>st</sup> Century lives. A place where dependency is the norm and to be in a wheelchair confers

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<sup>115</sup> Another section of Talmud relates to the laws concerning marriage where someone with the understanding level of a six-year-old child is deemed capable of understanding the marriage ceremony. There are, however, some exceptions, and Rabbis can take specific circumstances into account when deciding if someone can marry.

<sup>116</sup> RDS Nevins, "The Participation of Jews Who Are Blind in the Torah Service," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 10, no. 3 (2007). p. 28.

<sup>117</sup> Joav Merrick, in an article on how Judaism regards people with mental disabilities, explains that it is only in recent times that deaf people have not been regarded as in a similar capacity to imbeciles. Merrick reports that it was not until 1963 that deaf people were permitted to the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, ceremonies which recognise the passing of a boy or girl from childhood to adulthood. Blind people, however, have always been accorded the same rights as others. There are two biblical verses which admonish those who mistreat blind people, Leviticus 19:14 and Deuteronomy 27:18. There is, however, a prohibition on a blind person performing priestly duties in Leviticus 21:17-23. Elsewhere in the Talmud there are rulings which categorise those with intellectual disabilities alongside minors. The reason for the definitions is to do with who has to go up to the Temple. Examples are given in the Talmud of people who may be considered an imbecile, such as someone who goes to the cemetery at night to spend the night alone there. J Merrick, Y Gabbay, and H Lifshitz, "Judaism and the Person with Intellectual Disability," *ibid.* 5, no. 2 (2001). pp. 49-63.

<sup>118</sup> M Morad, Y Nasri, and J Merrick, "Islam and the Person with Intellectual Disability," *ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>119</sup> Davis, *Bending over Backwards : Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*. p. 31.



certain advantages is Lourdes. When pilgrims go to Lourdes, the vast majority do not come back having been cured of their disabilities. What they do come back with, however, is a vision of what a society would be like that values its sick members as much if not more than its able-bodied ones.

Hauerwas even goes so far as to say that God is disabled, that God has needs when he says:

the challenge of learning to know, to be with, and care for the retarded is nothing less than learning to know, be with and love God. God's face is the face of the retarded; God's body is the body of the retarded; God's being is that of the retarded. For the God we Christians must learn to worship is not a god of self-sufficient power, a god who in self-possession needs no one; rather ours is a God who needs people, who needs a son.<sup>120</sup>

This is a theme which others have explored<sup>121</sup> and is reminiscent of Moltmann's Crucified God. A summary of Moltmann's argument, made by Alister McGrath, is that God is willing to undergo suffering because the alternative, a God who did not or could not suffer, would be an imperfect God.<sup>122</sup> In Moltmann's words

For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being.<sup>123</sup>

A development from this idea would be that humans need to suffer in order to love. If a human did not suffer then they would be insensitive, and incapable of feeling the sufferings of others. Being unable to feel physical pain is harmful to humans, not just for medical reasons.<sup>124</sup>

One difficulty with saying 'we are all wounded' is that it can seem to be diminishing the suffering of those who are very much more seriously disabled than the average person. A

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<sup>120</sup> S. Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). p. 178.

<sup>121</sup> Eiesland in *The Disabled God* and Swinton in *The Body of Christ has Down's Syndrome*.

<sup>122</sup> A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

<sup>123</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, vol. 112 (SCM Press London, 1974). p. 222.

<sup>124</sup> The condition of Congenital Analgesia, where someone is unable to feel pain, has been documented by Melzack in the case of a patient (Miss C) who died aged 29 when she developed infections in her limbs but was unaware of them because of her inability to feel pain. R. Puccetti, "Is Pain Necessary?," *Philosophy* 50, no. 193 (1975). In this article Puccetti dismisses the idea that pain is useful and therefore God-given, since it seems to be distributed very unfairly. Instead he ends up with an evolutionary theory of pain, one where the survival value of pain mechanisms means they have evolved to protect us from injury.

sincere desire to understand and share with the suffering of another person, a willingness to empathise with them, can be misunderstood by the person who thinks that no-one could possibly understand the depths of their own pain. Deep empathy is not something achieved by ignoring the very large gulf that separates those with disabilities from those who are not disabled.

*Third theme – being with disabled people brings gifts to those who are open to receive them*

Disabled people bring particular gifts to the able-bodied world, if we are willing to recognise these gifts. In this sense disabled people are a sign, a witness of the way which Jesus refers to in answer to the question about the blind man, ‘that the work of God might be displayed’.

The idea that being disabled is part of the human condition is taken up by Frances Young, who writes as a theologian and as the mother of a boy with severe cognitive and physical disabilities. She suggests that we can all benefit from working with and learning from people with disabilities. ‘But the handicapped may bring us our redemption. They can effect in us a change of heart, a new set of values, a new perspective. They can show us what true humanity is. There is a sense in which we are all handicapped, we are all mortal and vulnerable, and far from perfect.’<sup>125</sup> She points out that the relationship need not be one-sided, but that both able-bodied and disabled people can benefit. ‘The key, it seems to me, is establishing a reciprocal relationship with the handicapped. The most fundamental aspect of this is the recognition, not that we are doing them good, but that they are doing something for us.’<sup>126</sup>

Like Frances Young’s idea of ‘reciprocal relationships’ Henri Nouwen writes about the friendship he formed with a man called Adam who lived in a L’Arche community in Toronto. At first Nouwen found it almost impossible to relate to this profoundly disabled man, but gradually Nouwen became aware of a stillness within Adam which helped him gain his own self-understanding. ‘Sometimes when I was anxious, irritated, or frustrated about something [...] Adam came to mind and seemed to call me back to the stillness at the eye of the cyclone. The tables were turning. Adam was becoming *my* teacher, taking *me* by the hand, walking with me in my confusion through the wilderness of *my* life.’<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Frances M. Young, *Face to Face : A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990). p. 182.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 179.

<sup>127</sup> Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved*. p. 48.

Moltmann states that ‘we can see that every disablement can become a charisma.’<sup>128</sup> He says this in the context of discussing Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians in which he says ‘My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ (2Cor 12:9) He is arguing that people who are weak, disabled and not valuable in the eyes of the world, do have value to God. He also points out that God’s love can shine in the lives of disabled people. He talks about the crucified Christ and how this crucified body, disabled, disfigured, gives glory to God. All people, disabled and not disabled, are needed to be part of the body of Christ. He goes so far as to say that unless we have disabled people in our midst we are not complete. He also argues that ‘every handicap is an endowment too.’<sup>129</sup> He talks of charisma as a means of God’s love shining in their lives and recognises the way that handicapped and disabled people reveal God’s love through their lives. Moltmann is arguing that God becoming human in Jesus enables him to share in our life, including in our sufferings.

In the image of the crucified God the sick and dying can see themselves, because in them the crucified God recognizes himself. Through his passion Jesus brings God into the God-forsakenness of the sick and into the desolation of the dying. The crucified God embraces every sick life and makes it his life, so that he can communicate his own eternal life. And for that reason the crucified One is both the source of healing and consolation in suffering.<sup>130</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, would agree with this. Discussing the Resurrection of Jesus he argues that ‘the true face of God is shown, indeed, in suffering. In suffering God bears and shares the burden of the injustice of the world, so that in our very darkest hours, we may be sure that God is then closest to us.’<sup>131</sup>

Cushing and Lewis also observed the way those being cared for give ‘gifts’ to those who care for them. Such gifts may develop as a result of what might otherwise be seen as negative behaviour. ‘For example, one caregiver explained to me how he felt that the anxiety and compulsive questioning of one of the men with disabilities in his house was a gift in that it indirectly called him to cultivate calm in himself, both for his own sake and because of how it soothed the other man.’<sup>132</sup> Gérard Daucourt also talks about how Christ blesses us when we work with the poor and suffering. ‘So our work is not only about doing something for them,

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<sup>128</sup> J Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*(London: SCM). p. 67.

<sup>129</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*(Augsburg Fortress Publ, 2001). p. 193.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. pp. 191-2.

<sup>131</sup> In an interview with Peter Seewald in 1996 which was published as J. Ratzinger, "God and the World,"(Ignatius Press, 2002). p. 339.

<sup>132</sup> Cushing and Lewis, "Negotiating Mutuality and Agency in Care Giving Relationships with Women with Intellectual Disabilities." p. 182

but about receiving something – or rather someone – from them: Christ himself, in whom all the fullness of the divine blessing is found. Through the poor and the little people, God blesses us in Christ.<sup>133</sup>

In the non-Christian world the idea that those with disabilities can teach the non-disabled can also be found, as Susan Gabel explains.

In contrast to the Western view of disability-as-deficit, and in contrast to the Hindu notion that disability is the result of sin (bad *karma*), Sundar [the mother of the retarded child] embraces her daughter's difference as having an educative purpose by connecting it to past lives they both might have lived. She constructs her own explanatory narrative that is grounded in Indian embodiment and the notion that she will "take several bodies" before she learns all of life's lessons. Rather than seeing her daughter as punishment for past sins, Sundar believes her daughter is a gift from god that will help her in this and future lives.<sup>134</sup>

There have also been examples of people whose disability brings them artistic gifts. An example would be Hildegard of Bingen whose drawings which depicted her visions may have been as a result of migraines.<sup>135</sup> Caroline Molina considers the way that Hildegard regards illness as a prerequisite of her mystical experiences.<sup>136</sup> She argues that in doing this Hildegard was approaching illness in a completely different way from the conventions of her time. Hildegard, with a humility and denigration of her abilities reminiscent of Teresa de Cartagena's, argues that she cannot write as philosophers do. Instead she likens herself to Christ since he too suffered, and allowed himself to become powerless. This idea of sharing in the sufferings of Christ was a characteristic feature of medieval mysticism, but exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this chapter.

#### 4.2 Questions theology helps us to ask

##### *First question – Why does God permit suffering?*

In the context of disability discourse this question can be made more specific. If God did, indeed, create human beings in his own image, then how do we account for those who have congenital disabilities? How can someone who has a disability display the works of God in his life? Jesus firmly quashes the idea that disability is a form of punishment for sin, yet there

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<sup>133</sup> Gérard Dacourt in FM Young, *Encounter with Mystery: Reflections on L'Arche and Living with Disability* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997). p. 56

<sup>134</sup> Gabel, *Disability Studies in Education: Readings in Theory and Method*. p. 32.

<sup>135</sup> K. Podoll and D. Robinson, "The Migrainous Nature of the Visions of Hildegard of Bingen," *NEUROLOGY PSYCHIATRY AND BRAIN RESEARCH* 10, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>136</sup> C. Molina, "Illness as Privilege: Hildegard Von Bingen and the Condition of Mystic Writing," *Women's Studies* 23, no. 1 (1994).

are cases where someone's disability clearly is as a result of human error, as in the case of Thalidomide, for example.

Can comfort be drawn from the idea that suffering is 'God's will'? This very phrase has been vehemently disliked by those who argue that we should not accept things that can be changed. If someone accepts their fate to the extent that they refuse help, then it is easy to see why religious acceptance gets a bad name. God helps those who help themselves and there should be no contradiction between patient endurance, something Teresa of Avila advocated<sup>137</sup>, and active participation in attempts to alleviate suffering in all its forms.

In a subsequent section we shall see that Teresa de Cartagena is an enthusiastic advocate of the acceptance of God's will as a means to deal with suffering. Few people achieve Teresa's calm humility, however, and Amos Yong warns strongly against giving such advice to those who suffer. An academic theologian, Yong writes as the brother of someone with Down's Syndrome, and considers this issue in an article on the philosophy of religion.

Admittedly there are some who have come to terms with their disabilities as playing an important role in God's overall plan. The problem arises, however, when people with disabilities are told by the nondisabled that their disabilities are part of God's plan for their lives. It is one thing for an individual to come to accept his or her disability as the result of God's intentions, and embrace this as his or her own confession; it is quite another for others to be told by well-meaning and able-bodied people that God has basically chosen to inflict their disabilities for God's own reasons.<sup>138</sup>

### *Second question – are there two different kinds of suffering?*

The simple answer may be that there are many different kinds of suffering. The question was suggested by Dom Sebastian Moore, however, as the need to distinguish between suffering that is caused by sin and suffering that helps us to learn. Moore calls this a contrast between ego-centred pain and transformative pain. He argues that once we differentiate between these two types of suffering we can be free to live more fully. He links this to following Christ's *via crucis*, saying that

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<sup>137</sup> *Nada te turbe, Nada te espante, Todo se pasa, Dios no se muda, La paciencia Todo lo alcanza; Quien a Dios tiene Nada le falta: Solo Dios basta.* Quoted in C. Brian Morris, "The Poetry of Santa Teresa," *Hispania* 69, no. 2 (1986). [My translation is 'May nothing upset you, nothing alarm you. Everything passes, God never changes. Patience brings rewards; when you have God you lack nothing. God alone is enough.'] This is reminiscent of 2 Corinthians 12:9 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'

<sup>138</sup> A Yong, "Disability and the Love of Wisdom," in *Disability in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Sacred Texts, Historical Traditions, and Social Analysis*, ed. D. Schumm & M. Stoltzfus (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). p. 208.

What we learn from the cross is the difference between liberation from desire (the latter equated with the insatiable self-promoting ego) and liberation *of* desire from the chains of my customary way of being myself. Two contrary views of asceticism present themselves here. The conventional view is that it means denying ourselves things we want. A more discerning and disconcerting view is that it means dropping things we no longer want, admitting to ourselves we no longer want them, and this giving our journey, our story, a chance to move on.<sup>139</sup>

This argument leads to the idea that suffering can bring benefits to the sufferer, in the form of deeper understanding, something echoed by Teresa de Cartagena, who herself is echoing St Augustine and St Paul. This is described in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

Moore also suggests that suffering can bring an appreciation of God when the sufferer overcomes some aspect of their afflictions. Arguing that we try to tackle the problem of suffering the wrong way, by starting with God, he suggests an alternative approach is to try to find ‘meaning in a twisted and tortured existence.’<sup>140</sup> He then goes on to say that ‘when the victim triumphs over his circumstances and affirms, against all the appearances, the goodness of life, we say ‘*there is God*’.’<sup>141</sup>

It would be insensitive and unhelpful to tell a suffering person that their suffering will bring them blessings, however. In some ways this knowledge has to come from within them. Those who have been able to appreciate how their suffering has brought them blessings make powerful witnesses.

### *Third question – what is life in its fullness?*

Moore argues that ‘real desire, what I really want and have always wanted, is to be more and more myself in the mystery in which I am.’<sup>142</sup> Although Moore is writing about sexual desire, in a book of readings on theology and sexuality, some of what he says about bodies is relevant to considerations of disabled, as well as able bodies. The phrase ‘to be more and more myself’ is unfortunately not particularly enlightening for individuals. When Jesus says ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,’ (John 10:10) he does not tell us how this applies to someone with Downs’ Syndrome, or Alzheimer’s, or a spinal injury.

Inspired by Moore, Rowan Williams writes ‘I need a sense of active identity, which depends on being there *for* another; and clearly the optional form of being there for another is to be the

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<sup>139</sup> S. Moore, "The Crisis of an Ethic without Desire," in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. E.F. Rogers (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002). p. 159.

<sup>140</sup> *God Is a New Language* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967). p. 96.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 96.

<sup>142</sup> "The Crisis of an Ethic without Desire." p. 160.

object of another's love, the cause of joy in them.'<sup>143</sup> This suggests that loving and being loved is crucial to identity. Identity is an issue in the next question to be considered. If we carry our identity in this world forward into the next then does that mean we carry our disabilities too, since these may be part of our identity?

#### *Fourth question – What can we hope for after this life?*

This question relates to the world beyond this present 'vale of tears'. If Christians are correct in believing in the resurrection of the dead, what will those resurrected bodies be like? When Jesus tells his followers that he is going to prepare a place for us, what will that place be like for those with impairments? Will everyone sign, as has been suggested?<sup>144</sup> Will our ideas of disability be different in the eschaton? 'The conception of the body as natural generates the ideology that this body is the only "abled" one.'<sup>145</sup> If our ideas of normality are so rooted in the body then maybe when we have no bodies, or different, glorified bodies, we will be able to abandon our ideas of normality and therefore our ideas of abnormality and disability. This question becomes even more important when considering those with learning disabilities.

The 'how will you know me?' question raised by the girl which was described in the introduction touches a deep question of identity. It is also interesting to note how someone with intellectual impairment can still ask a deeply theological and philosophical question. There are issues here about change and healing which require further investigation and some of them are addressed by Amos Yong in his book about Down's Syndrome. Following a historical summary of theologians views on resurrection and eschatology, Yong rejects the idea that those with cognitive impairments are simply 'cured' in the eschaton. He quotes several people who would agree with him including Young<sup>146</sup>, Hauerwas<sup>147</sup> and Swinton<sup>148</sup> and goes on to develop what he calls a dynamic eschatology which can accommodate the challenges posed by those with cognitive impairments.

Yong's dynamic eschatology draws on an idea from Gregory of Nyssa called the doctrine of Epectasis. This is the idea that the soul is on a perpetual journey towards God, an idea which

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<sup>143</sup> R. Williams, *On Christian Theology*(Wiley, 2000). p. 73.

<sup>144</sup> The title of Monique Moultrie's article, "In the World to Come God Will Sign" comes from an anecdote about a teacher who was working with a deaf student. The teacher told the student that in the world to come she would be able to hear. The student replied "In the world to come, God will sign." This story originated in E Elshout et al., "Roundtable Discussion: Women with Disabilities a Challenge to Feminist Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>145</sup> Michalko, *The Difference That Disability Makes*. p. 47.

<sup>146</sup> Young, *Face to Face : A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering*.

<sup>147</sup> Hauerwas, S in F. Dougherty and A. Smith, *The Deprived, the Disabled, and the Fullness of Life*(Michael Glazier).

<sup>148</sup> J. Swinton, "Building a Church for Strangers," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 4, no. 4 (2001).

has scriptural support in the words of Paul, ‘And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.’ (2Cor 3:18)<sup>149</sup> Yong includes pneumatology in his theory since ‘the Spirit is understood as the elusive, shifting, energetic wind (*ruach*, or *pneuma*) of God’.<sup>150</sup>

Finally Yong argues that those with Down’s Syndrome will be recognised as having Down’s Syndrome in heaven.

There will be sufficient continuity to ensure recognisability as well as self-identity. Thus, the redemption of those with Down Syndrome, for example, would consist not in some magical fix of the twenty-first chromosome but in the recognition of their central roles both in the communion of saints and in the divine scheme of things.<sup>151</sup>

While this is encouraging, it does not explain how those central roles will be defined. What roles will anyone have in the eschaton? A role implies a task that needs to be done, and yet ideas of heaven as a place where there is work to be done are not congruent with those of a place where we rest from our labours, as on the seventh day. Later Yong acknowledges that there are still some unanswered, maybe unanswerable, questions about the eschaton, saying that the transformation that will change us from as we are now, into what we shall become will involve processes that we cannot, in our present state of knowledge, imagine. This may sound like a convenient escape by saying that some things are a mystery. Nevertheless Yong does end this chapter, and the book, on the positive note with a call for the Church to be more inclusive and welcoming to people with disabilities, something with which no-one could argue.<sup>152</sup>

#### 4.3 A case study (Teresa de Cartagena)

Leonard Cassuto discusses how Oliver Sacks, who uses case studies extensively in his writing, goes against the modern tendency to make case studies more ‘scientific’. He embarks on a ‘quest for romantic medicine, a practice that provides space for disabled people as

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<sup>149</sup> The hymn by John Wesley, *Love Divine all loves excelling*, contains the line ‘changed from glory into glory’ which reflects the same idea.

<sup>150</sup> A. Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*(Baylor Univ Pr, 2007). p. 278.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. 282.

<sup>152</sup> As a Protestant theologian Yong is unable to agree with the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. Vanier and Augustine would include Purgatory in their theologies. Yong claims that the Catholic doctrine lacks the social dimension, something which is important to his understanding. More discussion of Purgatory can be found in Chapter 2, footnote 199.



something other than problems and failures.’<sup>153</sup> Unlike those doctors who are firmly rooted in the medical model of disability, Sacks adopts the position of awed spectator when he studies people who have non-typical behaviours and symptoms. He approaches the subjects of his case studies as people who can teach him about what it is to be human. Having made such discoveries he is then obliged to share his findings and help others to engage in the same wonder that he finds in the diverse population of the world. What Sacks tries to do is ‘to show how wondrous such human diversity can be; to write himself into a bridge between communities that need to understand each other; and to convey the voices of those who need to be heard but aren’t always in a position to be heard.’<sup>154</sup> It is in the spirit of Sacks that the next section will consider just one case study of a person with a disability, in this case deafness.

Encarnación Juárez discusses the writing of the fifteenth century nun, Teresa de Cartagena who, at a time when most women could not even read and write, produced two books about her disabilities, *Arboleda de los enfermos* and *Admiración Operum Dey*. There are four areas in which Teresa’s account of her sufferings illuminate the exploration of those themes and questions already described. These are marginalisation, re-framing, the role of patience and witness.

### *Marginalisation*

The excursus of the previous section looked at marginalisation and how it affects disabled people. Teresa de Cartagena also suffered in this way and Juárez claims that she may have been the first to recognise the social model of disability as she mentions that her suffering is compounded by the way she has been socially rejected. As Teresa puts it

*Ca desde el enfermo y plagado se ve asý vmillado e despreçiado entre sus vezinos, non es de dubar que será pungido en el corazón de grande aflyçión y sentimiento, con tanto que puede ser, segund la calidad del despreçio y segund la persona que le reçibe, que sea más atormentada de aqueste dolor que no de los mucho[s] corporals que tenga<n>.*<sup>155</sup>

For when the invalid sees himself so humiliated and despised by his neighbours, there is no doubt that his heart is stung with great affliction and feeling, so that, depending

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<sup>153</sup> L Cassuto, "Oliver Sacks and the Medical Case Narrative," in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. B.J. Brueggemann (New York: Modern Languages Association of America). p. 125.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p. 129.

<sup>155</sup> T Cartagena, "Arboleda De Los Enfermos Y Admiración Operum Dey," *Ed. Lewis Joseph Hutton. Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 16. p. 90.

on the quality of the contempt and the person who receives it, someone can be more tormented by this type of anguish than by his many physical pains.<sup>156</sup>

Here Teresa indicates how other people, and their attitude towards disability, increases the suffering of the disabled person.

Teresa was marginalised for several reasons. She was a woman, from a convert family, a disabled person, deaf and suffering from other unspecified ailments. Amy Kaminsky explains the precarious position of the *conversos*.

Their situation was tenuous: old Christians were suspicious of them for having been Jews and because the most visible of them now occupied positions of great influence. Jews, for their part, regarded *conversos* as traitors. The Inquisition would be particularly concerned with them, and as a community they were victims of Christian riots.<sup>157</sup>

She goes on to describe Teresa's illustrious family.

Teresa's grandfather had been Selomo Ha-Levi, poet and chief rabbi of Burgos, before his conversion. Taking the name Pablo de Santa Maria, he traded his former title for that of bishop of the same city. Ha-Levi's conversion may have had more to do with his desire to extend his power than with religious zeal, but two generations later, Teresa was an orthodox Catholic, though with full awareness of the precarious situation of the *conversos*.<sup>158</sup>

On the subject of her marginalised position, Deyermond comments 'Cartagena also fuses her isolation caused by deafness with the fear of isolation which beset her family and others of their class in the aftermath of the Toledo rising.'<sup>159</sup> This took place in 1449 and it is generally presumed that *Arboleda* was written around this time. Teresa uses the phrase '*la çibdat de nuestra consçiençia*' (the city of our conscience) several times and Deyermond interprets this as being an image which is linked to Augustine's City of God. Just as the earthly cities which present dangers, so the conscience is vulnerable to attack from *cobdicia tenporal* (temporal lust). What is interesting is that Teresa says '*sy todo este maldito pueblo se leuanta contra el*

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<sup>156</sup> Cartagena and Seidenspinner-Núñez, *The Writings of Teresa De Cartagena*. p. 69.

<sup>157</sup> AK Kaminsky, *Water Lilies: Flores Del Agua: An Anthology of Spanish Women Writers from the Fifteenth through the Nineteenth Century*(University of Minnesota Press, 1996). p. 37

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. pp. 37-8.

<sup>159</sup> A Deyermond, "Spain's First Women Writers," in *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols*, ed. Beth Kurti Miller(University of California Press, 1983). p. 44.

*anima nuestra, [en] tanto mayor peligro e peor librada ella esta.*<sup>160</sup> (if all these evil-minded people rise up against our soul, the soul is in greater danger and in less freedom.)<sup>161</sup> This suggests the soul is a slave to greed (*codicia* in modern Spanish can be translated as greed) and that freedom comes from letting go of such greed. 'So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.' (Jn 8:36)

Disabled people are on the margins of society, excluded as Teresa was. Jesus was drawn to such people, but why was this? Perhaps he recognised their intrinsic worth and such recognition confirms that disabled people have intrinsic worth and need to be cared for by those who are not so marginalised.

### *Reframing*

Reframing is a technique sometimes used by therapists trying to help their clients to think more positively.<sup>162</sup> A simple way to think of this technique is the idea of turning a negative into a positive, or, more colloquially, 'every cloud has a silver lining'. In the case of Teresa, she manages to turn her deafness into an advantage, as in her silent world she is able to hear the voice of God through her reading. Mazzeo reminds his readers that, at the moment of his conversion, St Augustine was reading in silence. 'Saint Augustine had finally learned the meaning of silence and that St Ambrose's "good reason" for silence was nothing else than listening to the instruction of the inner teacher. A philosophical theology of silence was present in both Platonism and Christianity, and the latter began to develop it quite early.'<sup>163</sup>

<sup>164</sup>

Teresa explains the benefits of silence and how it allows one to concentrate, to be free from distractions, to hear with an inner ear what God wants her to hear. She is grateful that God has not only taken away her hearing, but also her desire to hear. She calls this her resurrection and Juarez explains how 'In this solitude, with the advice she finds in books and with divine help and guidance, her deserted island full of affliction is transformed into a grove (*arboleda*)

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<sup>160</sup> Cartagena, "Arboleda De Los Enfermos Y Admiración Operum Dey." p. 46.

<sup>161</sup> My own translation.

<sup>162</sup> 'Patients often interpret their own behavior, or that of others, in ways that make for continuing difficulties. If we can only redefine the meaning or implications attributed to the behavior, this itself may have a powerful effect on attitudes, responses and relationships.' John H. Weakland et al., "Brief Therapy: Focused Problem Resolution," *Family Process* 13, no. 2 (1974). p. 287.

<sup>163</sup> JA Mazzeo, "St. Augustine's Rhetoric of Silence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23, no. 2 (1962). p. 192.

<sup>164</sup> Augustine had at first been surprised to find Ambrose engaged in silent reading, a practice which was very unusual in those days.

abounding with solace for her soul.<sup>165</sup> Teresa's resurrection only comes when she accepts her limitations, and her suffering, and ceases struggling against them. 'When she renounces the recovery of her lost paradise and embraces her pain, she achieves an integrated identity.'<sup>166</sup> Thus her pain and isolation become 'an instrument of experience that makes her wiser and leads her to a realm unexplored by healthy and able people.'<sup>167</sup>

Some of her writing consists of Biblical exegesis as, for example, with the story of sick people who are invited to the feast (Luke 14:21-23) She uses this story to chide those sick people who still do not take up this invitation, and who remain attached to the desires of the world, when they should, as she has done, abandon these worldly things. She observes that people often ignore God when things are going well and only turn to him when we are in need. '*Así que la tristeza e tribulación son dos espuelas que nos hazen corer a la devoute oración.*'<sup>168</sup> ('Thus sadness and tribulation are two spurs that goad us toward devout prayer.')<sup>169</sup> She then goes on to mention 2 Corinthians 12:9 where the Lord says that 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'

These examples show how Teresa uses reframing to turn her disadvantage into an advantage. She interprets the pain of her deafness and of her other unspecified disabilities into a blessing from God. She regards her deafness at first as a punishment, but later is able to thank God for the sanctuary of her silent world. This silence protects her from the pressures of society, the noise, the clamour, the hubbub of the world. Many monastics, before her and since, have found the treasure of a silent world, including the Desert Fathers, St Benedict and generations of Trappist monks including Thomas Merton. In her silence she studies the scriptures and other books and is able to think, pray and write. In the silence of her cell she is able to communicate with God in a way that had been denied her while still in the hearing world. Thus she devises her own theology of disability, and writes it down for the benefit of others. Why she wrote it is by no means clear, but that she did is something to add to the wondrous works of God.

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<sup>165</sup> E Juárez, "The Autobiography of the Aching Body in Teresa De Cartagena's *Arboleda De Los Enfermos*," in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. B.J. Brueggemann (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2002). p. 136.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

<sup>168</sup> Cartagena, "Arboleda De Los Enfermos Y Admiración Operum Dey." p. 61.

<sup>169</sup> Cartagena and Seidenspinner-Núñez, *The Writings of Teresa De Cartagena*. p. 45.

### Patience

In a section where she explains the derivation of the word 'patience' is from *paz*, meaning suffering (as in passion or endurance) and *çiençia* meaning science or wisdom or knowledge, thus 'patience is nothing else but to suffer with prudence,'<sup>170</sup> Teresa explains how suffering brings benefits to the sufferer. She then goes on to distinguish between sufferings that are good and come from a good source and those that are bad and come from a bad source. The latter are those that are given to us by the world whereas the former come from God. She quotes Augustine as saying that 'his pain does not a martyr make but rather his cause.'<sup>171</sup> This means that suffering alone does not guarantee that a crown of righteousness will be your reward.

Instead of praying to God for health, Teresa recommends praying for patience. '*Ca mas vale vn dia de paçiençia perfeta que [no] (de) diez anos de salud corporal.*'<sup>172</sup> ('For one day of perfect patience is worth ten years of physical health.')<sup>173</sup> She also quotes St Augustine as saying 'Tribulations work patience'<sup>174</sup> an idea which is compared to Romans 5:3. (Suffering produces endurance). There are links here to the idea expressed in Teresa of Avila's prayer '*La paciencia todo lo alcanza*' (patience brings rewards).

### Witness

Teresa's second work, *Admiración operum Dey* was written as a defence of the first work which others had criticised and claimed could not possibly have been written by a mere woman. She suggests that the reason they are amazed is because, in her time, women so rarely wrote anything. To this she answers that God can just as well bestow his wisdom on a woman as on a man. The next section is a discussion of the possible reasons why God might have made men and women different. She then uses the story of Judith, who beheaded Nebuchadnezzar's commander in chief, Holofernes, to illustrate the idea that sometimes God can empower women to do something that seems to be contrary to their nature.

Then she explains that if God can empower a woman to do something that is very different from her normal skills, then he can certainly enable a woman to do something that is not so outlandish. She observes that being eloquent is not so difficult, as well as to use a pen being

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 48.

<sup>171</sup> From Sermo CCLXXXV in *Opera omnia*, PL 38:1293 'Illud ergo praecipue commonendi estism quod assidue commoneri, et Semper cogitare debetism quod martyrem Dei non facit poena, sed causa.' Footnote on p. 48 of ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Cartagena, "Arboleda De Los Enfermos Y Admiración Operum Dey." p. 101

<sup>173</sup> Cartagena and Seidenspinner-Núñez, *The Writings of Teresa De Cartagena*. p. 79

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p. 81.

easier than to use a sword. Also God bestows his gifts as he chooses, and not according to some human scale of values or worthiness. With writing like this it is easy to see why Teresa has supporters in the feminist movement and Deyermond suggests that 'her unflinching defence of a woman's right to literary activity make the *Admiración* [...] the first extant piece of feminist writing in Spanish.'<sup>175</sup>

Ronald Surtz includes Teresa de Cartagena in his book about Medieval Spanish women writers by describing her as one of the 'Mothers' of St Teresa of Avila. Although he acknowledges that it is unlikely that Teresa of Avila knew of or had read Teresa de Cartagena, the worlds they inhabited were somewhat similar. Teresa de Cartagena, who predated Teresa of Avila by some 90 years, was able to read the Bible in the vernacular, whereas by Teresa of Avila's time only the vulgate was permitted. This was due to the Spanish Inquisition which feared that if Jewish converts read the Old Testament of the Bible in Spanish they might revert to Judaism once more.

Surtz discusses Teresa de Cartagena's exegesis of Luke 18:35-43, the healing of the blind man near Jericho. Teresa considers that she was metaphorically blind and God allowed her to see, by illuminating her mind so much that she was able to write the book. Surtz makes much here of Teresa's use of Latin (a masculine language) in contrast to the mother tongue, Castilian Spanish. It is as if Teresa is not just appropriating the male weapon, of the pen, but the male language, Latin, as well. That might have annoyed her male readers, on top of everything else.

Just as the blind man was told to keep quiet, and still he cried out, so Teresa refuses to be silent and carries on writing. Teresa in some way has performed a miracle, in that she has overcome the constraints of her enfeebled gender. As Surtz puts it 'Like Judith, Teresa is a weak woman. Nonetheless, she is divinely empowered to perform a deed that is – in her own eyes – as wondrous as that of the slaying of Holofernes.'<sup>176</sup> Then he goes on to interpret Teresa's deafness and how she overcame it, or rather how she allowed God to use her in spite of her deafness. He claims that

God does not cure Teresa's deafness as such, but [...] her deafness turns out to be a boon, for it makes possible the small miracle of the turning to God of her interior ear and eventually the even greater wonder of the composition of a book. Teresa reiterates

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<sup>175</sup> Deyermond, "Spain's First Women Writers." p. 42.

<sup>176</sup> RE Surtz, *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: The Mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). p. 38.

this connection shortly after the episode of the blind man when she observes that the Lord closed the doors of her ears and opened the eyes of her understanding and she saw and followed the Saviour.<sup>177</sup>

Surtz then comments that ‘If blindness and deafness are signs of weakness, then bodily infirmities turn out to be empowering. Teresa’s deafness is both a physical handicap and a sign of her weakness as a female, that is, the very weakness that makes possible the astounding transformation of that weak woman into a “manly” writer of treatises.’<sup>178</sup>

‘Teresa thereby reduces herself and her writing to a mere sign of divine might, for in her view the *Arboleda* is less a treatise with a didactic message than an icon that denotes the power of the Almighty to empower the weak.’<sup>179</sup> So when God empowers powerless disabled people it is a sign of his wonders.

Teresa does not keep her discoveries to herself. She shares them with her readers. She calls those readers to learn from her and to use their own sufferings to develop patience and thus wisdom. In this way Teresa is a sign to those who suffer. Others are invited to recognise the value of their own sufferings, and to bear witness to the works of God. She models the way of acceptance by her example. She demonstrates the gifts that her sufferings have brought her, and invites us to do the same. The theme of all being wounded seems more authentic coming from Teresa, someone who has suffered herself. She allows us to see that suffering need not be recoiled from in fear. She also suggests an answer to that question of why God allows suffering. Could it be for the gifts that suffering brings? Does God permit disability because disabled people bring gifts which we can all share? Is this another example of the answer Jesus gave to the question about the blind man, that disability is so that ‘the works of God might be displayed’?

#### 4.4 Critical evaluation

Faith communities need to move beyond issues of wheelchair access to their buildings. This is a serious issue, of course, but there are more serious issues to be considered than just accessibility. Faith communities should be reaching out to people with all kinds of disabilities and should make them feel welcome as part of the group of believers. Faith communities should recognise the divine presence in those who are marginalised. Moltmann goes so far as to say that people who are able-bodied need to recognise the ministry of the handicapped to

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

them and says that ‘Congregations without any disabled members are disabled and disabling congregations.’<sup>180</sup>

There are some notable exceptions, such as the work of John Swinton,<sup>181</sup> and Hans Reinders,<sup>182</sup> but very little research seems to be happening in the area of the spirituality of those with cognitive impairments. Even the theology of disability seems not to have made huge progress since Nancy Eiesland’s *The Disabled God* was published in 1994.<sup>183, 184</sup> In that book she comments that ‘it would be a worthwhile and much-needed project to examine the experience of persons with intellectual, social, or emotional disabilities within the church.’<sup>185</sup>

Robert Perske suggests that ‘our task should be to enlarge the existing general theological views so that they include the mentally retarded. If we sincerely see the mentally retarded as human beings, we should struggle to broaden and strengthen our general theological views to encompass people with other defects as well.’<sup>186</sup> So he is recommending here that instead of trying to devise a special theology for those with learning disabilities, we should try to enlarge and develop our existing theologies to be more inclusive.

Perske then goes on to look at the advantages if we can devise a theology that includes those who have cognitive disabilities. First he says that it would strengthen our view of the nature of God. God can survive our rage at him because of the injustice of disability. We can wrestle with God all we like, but he is still stronger than us. Secondly we can learn that we do not have to do anything in order to be accepted by God. Just as we can love those with disabilities regardless of what they cannot do, so God can love us in spite of our own limitations. Thirdly we can learn to accept our limitations, just as those with disabilities learn to accept theirs. Instead of constantly striving for perfection, we should instead learn to live with our own disabilities, and also be willing to live with the disabilities of other human beings around us.

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<sup>180</sup> Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. p. 193.

<sup>181</sup> John Swinton, "The Body of Christ Has Down's Syndrome," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* (2004).

<sup>182</sup> HS Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*(Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>183</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God : Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

<sup>184</sup> An exception being Amos Yong’s *Theology and Down Syndrome*, published in 2007.

<sup>185</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God : Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. p. 27.

<sup>186</sup> R Perske, "An Attempt to Find an Adequate Theological View of Mental Retardation," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 7, no. 1 (2003). p. 45.



## Summary and Conclusions

This chapter began by looking at the language of disability, how it changes and is context-dependent and how labels influence people's perceptions of those who have impairments. This was followed by a brief survey of the history of disability activism, including the influence of the medical model. The third section looked more closely at how a socially constructed view of disability has been influential in disability studies. There was also recognition of the particular area of disability which relates to those who suffer from mental or cognitive impairments. The final section introduced some theological considerations and included a case study of Teresa de Cartagena, a deaf Spanish nun who lived in the fifteenth century.

Many writers in the field of disability studies use case studies of disabled people in their work. Some academics are disabled themselves and use their own experiences to illustrate their work. Reading the stories of those who have suffered in some way because of their impairments is both humbling and edifying. Hearing the voices of these people, some of them from as long ago as 1450, gives plenty of material on which to ponder. Of all these voices, the one that speaks most clearly, is the young girl who, when told that she will no longer be retarded when she gets to heaven, asks, 'but how will you know me?' When she asks this most important question, she is asking on behalf of all such children, and maybe on behalf of all of us, too.

## Chapter 2 Mindfulness in Abraham's bosom:

*Augustine on the resurrection of the dead and how his eschatology might apply to those with cognitive impairment.*

*And now he lives in Abraham's bosom. Whatever that may be, whatever the gospel word "bosom" may mean, there my Nebridius is living, to me a friend most tenderly loved, to you, Lord, a freedman adopted as your son; yes, there he lives on. Where else could such a soul be at home? He is alive in that place about which he used to ask me so many questions, ignorant and paltry fellow that I am. No longer does he bend his ear to my mouth; rather does he lay the mouth of his spirit to your fountain and avidly slake his thirst as he drinks your wisdom to the uttermost of his capacity, in happiness without end. Yet I cannot believe that he is so inebriated as to forget me, since you, Lord, from whom he drinks, are mindful of us.<sup>187</sup>*

### Introduction

The quotation above where Augustine is lamenting the loss of his dear friend Nebridius gives a delightful glimpse of an ordinary Augustine, a man who suffers loss and bereavement like anyone else. His friend has gone to be with God, and Augustine hopes that he has not been forgotten when Nebridius is in the bosom of Abraham. This chapter explores some of the ideas that lie beneath this confidence, the theology which underpinned Augustine's faith that after death there is a place where we shall drink from the spiritual fountain of wisdom.

### Sources and the justification for their use

Augustine would not have been familiar with the word 'eschatology',<sup>188</sup> and he did not try to summarise his ideas on the life hereafter in anything like a systematic way. Since the Augustine corpus is too large for full consideration to be possible, this chapter focuses on a restricted number of works. Augustine outlines his ideas about the eschaton in three principal areas. The first is in his major works, in particular *City of God* Books 20 and 22, where Augustine describes his beliefs about the Last Judgement and the heavenly city. A second major work, which Roland Teske describes as 'one of the great works of his [Augustine's] maturity',<sup>189</sup> is *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, a literal, rather than allegorical, commentary

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<sup>187</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. M. Boulding, vol. 1 (New City Press, 1997). 9.3.6 p. 213.

<sup>188</sup> According to Tommaso Stancati, Julian of Toledo was the 'the first theologian to have compiled a systematic work on Christian eschatology.' (p. xi) T. Stancati, *Julian of Toledo Prognosticum Futuri Saeculi (Foreknowledge of the World to Come): Volume 63 Di Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 63 (The Newman Press, 2010). Hillgarth describes this work as 'a new and more scientific type of theological manual, a systematic attempt to ascertain and state in compressed form the opinions of the Fathers on a number of debateable points.' JN Hillgarth, "St. Julian of Toledo in the Middle Ages," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21, no. 1/2 (1958). p. 16.

<sup>189</sup> R.J. Teske, "De Genesi Ad Litteram Liber," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald and J.C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999). p. 378.

on the book of Genesis. (In the final chapter of this Augustine expounds his ideas about Paul's vision of the Third Heaven.) The second is in the pastoral writings, such as his sermons, particularly those for the Easter season which look at post-resurrection gospel accounts and letters. Some of the *Expositions on the Psalms* are also included as pastoral writings since they are similar in format to his sermons. The third area includes books on the Christian faith, including the *Enchiridion* and *Faith and the Creed*. By concentrating on these particular areas the reader can appreciate how Augustine's eschatology is something embedded in his theology. This examination of the pastoral approach also reveals Augustine's ideas as they might relate to people with disabilities, particularly cognitive impairment. In addition to these the above quote from *Confessions* will be discussed since it shows a more personal side to Augustine when he describes his reaction to the death of his friend, Nebridius. This chapter will be imposing a structure on that eschatology which enables it to be examined, but this is not a structure which Augustine himself would have acknowledged.

## Overview

Augustine never wrote a work which was specifically on spirituality.<sup>190</sup> It is hard to know what he might have thought the word 'spirituality' actually meant, or if he would have recognised it as a separate concept from any of the other areas of his writing. Mary T Clark argues that Augustine's spirituality was Christocentric, in a Trinitarian context, saying that 'in Augustine's spirituality there are two emphases: interiority and "image."' <sup>191</sup> She continues by explaining that he acquired his understanding of interiority from Plotinus and his understanding of image from the book of Genesis.

The spirituality Augustine lived and taught was nothing other than the integration of one's Christian beliefs with one's daily life. In all three aspects – individual, communal, institutional – it is biblical and evangelical, therefore both incarnational and eschatological. [...] Augustine's own spiritual life comprised union with God, communion with his neighbours, and ministry to those in need of spiritual and material assistance.<sup>192</sup>

The term Augustinian Spirituality can be found readily in contemporary books on spirituality.<sup>193</sup> Augustine's spiritual ideas are scattered throughout all his other works. This

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<sup>190</sup> H.C. Graef, *The Light and the Rainbow*(Longmans, 1959). p. 187.

<sup>191</sup> Clark, M.T. in A. Fitzgerald and J.C. Cavadini, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*(Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999). p. 814.

<sup>192</sup> Clark, M. T. In *ibid.* p. 815.

<sup>193</sup> J. Goggin and K. Strobel, *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals*(InterVarsity Press, 2013). p. 66; G.S. Wakefield, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*(Westminster John

was because he did not regard the spiritual life as a topic on its own, but instead the spiritual life is part of all aspects of life. Augustine's spirituality is rooted in his human experience, in the everyday, commonplace as well as in the extraordinary vision of divine light. Graef describes the vision at Ostia,<sup>194</sup> as one which 'taught him that the way to God is a way from without to within, and from within to something that surpasses even the highest summit of the soul.'<sup>195</sup> She might also agree that Augustine's eschatology was part of all that he wrote, part of his fundamental beliefs and of what he taught.

## 1. Key Concepts at the Macro level

This section takes four key concepts at the macro level in order to examine Augustine's eschatology in a systematic way. The first concept considered is the two different ways that Augustine refers to the Sabbath rest at the end of time. This is followed by a discussion about realised eschatology, a term which was introduced long after Augustine but which encapsulates a concept that can be found in Augustine's writing. The final debate of this section relates to Augustine's belief that there is no universal salvation.

### 1.1 The Sabbath rest

One way to access Augustine's understanding of the world to come in cosmic terms is by considering his views about the eternal Sabbath. He uses the term 'Sabbath' again and again as a kind of shorthand for the world to come, thereby linking the subject to the seven days of creation. Eschatology is the study of God's plan for the whole of creation, and encompasses how this plan has aspects which are both inside and outside of time. Within time we have the historical fact of Christ's life, death and resurrection, events which happened in time. These, according to Augustine, prefigure our own bodily resurrection, which will take place outside of time, after the Last Judgement. Between our death and the Last Judgement is a period of rest, like the Sabbath rest, when we wait for the final end, which will lead to 'the end of ultimate fulfilment that knows no destructive end.'<sup>196</sup> Augustine developed his views about the Sabbath over the course of his lifetime and some of those different views will now be considered.

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Knox Press, 1983). P.33; P. Tyler and R. Woods, *The Bloomsbury Guide to Christian Spirituality*(Bloomsbury Academic, 2012). Ch. 5.

<sup>194</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 1. 9.10.23-24.

<sup>195</sup> Graef, *The Light and the Rainbow*. p 189. She goes on to quote from *Confessions* 10.17 'Ascending through my mind I pass on to You, who dwell above me'.

<sup>196</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 19.10. p. 864.

In some works Augustine talks of the Seventh day as being without evening, just as the Seventh day in the Creation story had no evening. The *Confessions*, *City of God* and the letter to Januarius all contain examples of this.<sup>197</sup> In addition, Sermon 259 (for the octave of Easter) talks about the significance of the eighth day and how this differs from the seventh day. This difference is between the temporary, within time, period of waiting (the seventh day) and the ultimate end, which is outside of time (the eighth day). ‘Therefore, the eighth day signifies the new life at the end of the world; the seventh day, the future rest of the saints on this earth.’<sup>198</sup> Later in this sermon he says ‘But, when that sixth day will have passed, rest will come after the judgement, and the holy and just ones of God will celebrate their Sabbath.’ This uses slightly different terminology, but is again indicating the ultimate, outside of time, end. Thus Augustine uses the word Sabbath in two ways, sometimes to mean the intermediate rest which holy souls enjoy after death, and at other times to indicate the final rest of creation after the Resurrection of the dead, something he calls the eternal Sabbath. The intermediate rest, between death and resurrection, is what Augustine means when he refers to the bosom of Abraham. He uses the term *abditis receptaculis* or secret storerooms, to allude to this place, which is secret since we do not know who is there, or where it is. This place bears some resemblance to what came to be known as Purgatory.<sup>199</sup> An example to illustrate this can be found in the *Enchiridion*, a handbook which Augustine wrote to answer the questions of the layman, Laurentius.

But during the time which intervenes between a man's death and the resurrection at the last, men's souls are reserved in secret storehouses, at rest or in tribulation according to each soul's deserts, according to its lot in the flesh during life.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> ‘But the seventh day is without any evening, nor has it any setting, because You have sanctified it to an everlasting continuance that that which Thou did after Your works, which were very good, resting on the seventh day, although in unbroken rest.’ *The Confessions*, 1. 13, 36. ‘during the sixth day, which is to be followed by a Sabbath which has no evening, the endless rest of the saints’ *City of God*. 22. 7. ‘Seek out the seven days; read Genesis; you will find the seventh day without an evening, which signifies rest without end. [...] Thus, the eighth day shall be as the first, so that the first life may be restored to immortality.’ Letter 55 to Januarius. The reference is to Gen 2:2,3. *Letters, Volume 1 (1-82)*(CUA Press).

<sup>198</sup> *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*(The Catholic University of America Press, 2008). The idea that there will be a perpetual Sabbath is mentioned by Augustine in *City of God* 22.30, and this is referred to below. There is further discussion of the question of when the end of the world will come in the exchange of letters between Augustine and Hesychius, in the following section, below.

<sup>199</sup> The word ‘purgatory’ has the same root as purgative, something which clears out waste, is cleansing and health-giving, something which purifies. The Catechism of the Catholic Church considers Purgatory to be a place of cleansing where those who are destined for heaven are purified ‘so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.’ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Urbi Et Orbi Communications, 1994). 1030, 1031.

<sup>200</sup> *Enchiridion or Manual to Laurentius*, trans. E. Evans(London, 1953). Ch. 109.

Augustine's second use of the word Sabbath is when he discusses the eternal Sabbath, the time which happens after the resurrection of the dead, that moment of change from time to eternity, a crucially important event. 'Because it stands as the dividing-line between time and eternity, between humanity's age of growth and change and its age of fulfilment, the resurrection of the dead is, for Augustine, the one genuinely eschatological event.'<sup>201</sup> After this pivotal point Augustine says

That will truly be the greatest of Sabbaths; a Sabbath that has no evening, the Sabbath that the Lord approved at the beginning of creation, where it says 'God rested on the seventh day from all his works, which he had been doing; and God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he rested from all his works, which God had begun to do.' [Genesis 2:2-3] We ourselves shall become that seventh day, when we have been replenished and restored by his blessing and sanctification. There we shall have leisure to be still, and we shall see that he is God.<sup>202</sup>

There are several ideas expressed here. First he draws on the Genesis story of creation, reminding us of the divine intention to rest and make the seventh day holy. Secondly he says that we shall be the seventh day<sup>203</sup> which conveys the idea that we shall be a people who enjoy the Sabbath, in the same way that practising Jews rejoice in the community aspects of the Sabbath and believe it to be a true gift from God. Thirdly he indicates, with the words 'replenished and restored' that we will be satisfied, there will be no need unmet. Finally he quotes from Psalm 46 that we will be still, knowing God, and through knowing him, knowing and recognising each other. It is this final idea, that of recognition, which relates most strongly to the question of identity in the eschaton, the key question for this thesis. For Augustine, knowing God would certainly include knowing God's creatures. Fellow citizens of the City of God will know and recognise each other in their heavenly rest.

Other references to the end of time can be found in homilies such as the exposition of Psalm 109<sup>204</sup> where Augustine talks about the harvest at the end of the world (Matt 13:41-43). Here he considers heaven as another name for eternal life, adding that 'eternal life is a state of vision, for the Lord also said, *This is eternal life, to know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.* (Jn 17:3)'<sup>205</sup> Earlier in this exposition he quotes from Matthew saying

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<sup>201</sup> B. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge Univ Pr, 1991). p. 141.

<sup>202</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.30 p. 1090.

<sup>203</sup> In the Latin, *Dies enim septimus etiam nos ipsi erimus.*

<sup>204</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 99-120*, ed. B. Ramsey, trans. M. Boulding (New City Press, 2003). p. 278.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. p. 278.

‘The householder will send his angels to gather up from his kingdom all that makes people stumble, and throw it into the blazing furnace.’ It is interesting to note here that the weeds are the things that make people stumble. This idea has the implication that ‘things’ rather than people with evil intentions are the cause of stumbling. There are links to consider between this section and what follows when the question of universal salvation is discussed.

## 1.2 Realised Eschatology

As was discussed in the previous section, Augustine makes a distinction between the first and second resurrections, although at times the distinction is blurred. It is not always easy to distinguish, in Augustine's writing, between these two eschatological ideas, that of a future already realised, and that of a future yet to come. The first resurrection is that of the soul, and this has already occurred for those who have been baptised. This occurred when Christ was raised from the dead. The second resurrection will come for all at the end of the world, and is also referred to as the last judgement.<sup>206</sup> Although the term ‘realised eschatology’<sup>207</sup> had not been coined in Augustine's time, his views do accord with a realised viewpoint. Augustine emphasises that we are already living in post-resurrection time, by which he means time after the resurrection of Christ.<sup>208</sup> Augustine explains that the Old Testament signs of the coming of the Messiah are indications that Christ is present (i.e. had already come) to his Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also takes a realised approach to eschatology, as, for example, in the extracts from the sections on articles eleven and twelve of the Creed.<sup>209</sup> This says that ‘Christ will raise us up "on the last day"; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ.’<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> For further discussion of this see P. Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity. From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo," *Vigiliae christianae* 45, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>207</sup> According to Carl Braaten, there is no consensus amongst twentieth century theologians about eschatology. A variety of approaches, both Protestant and Catholic, are considered in CE Braaten and RW Jenson, *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002). One of several approaches is that of realised eschatology, a term usually attributed to the New Testament scholar, Charles H Dodd (1884-1973). Dodd maintained that the ‘last things’ have already happened since the life, death and resurrection of Christ have inaugurated the new order. Whilst Dodd would agree that the final end has not yet happened, he would argue that the Kingdom of God has already been realised. Clarence T. Craig, "Realized Eschatology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56, no. 1 (1937). A key issue for debate is that of universal salvation, something which is considered below.

<sup>208</sup> Marrou explains that from this Augustine developed his idea of *Totus Christus*. When Augustine speaks of *Totus Christus* he is referring to the idea that the Church is the Body of Christ, forming part of the whole Christ (*Totus Christus*) of which Christ himself is the head. H.I. Marrou, "The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values," (1966).

<sup>209</sup> Article 11: ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body’ and Article 12: ‘I believe in life everlasting.’

<sup>210</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Paragraph 1002. This includes a verse from Col 3:1 ‘If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.’

Since humans live in real time, they are aware of, and relate to, the past and the present, and also they think about the future. When Augustine's contemporaries thought about the future they were sometimes led to speculate about the end of the world, and to wonder if it would happen very soon. An example of this concern will be dealt with in a later section in connection with the correspondence Augustine had with Hesychius. In order to believe in a future world to come, Christians also need to be aware that Christ is already present in the Church. In the words of the hymn

*Had Christ, that once was slain,  
ne'er burst his three-day prison,  
our faith had been in vain;  
but now is Christ arisen,...*<sup>211</sup>

Augustine says much the same thing in his Easter Sermons.<sup>212</sup> Following that first resurrection, what would the second resurrection be like? Such a question obviously was asked by Augustine's congregation and he attempts to answer it in various sermons, particularly sermons 361 and, one which will be considered below, 362. Would the world after the Last Judgement be restored to the state of the world at its creation? This is a question which will be addressed in the following section.

### 1.3 Apokatastasis

Apokatastasis is the term used for the understanding that at the end of time the earth will be restored to its original state, that of the Garden of Eden before the Fall. For Augustine this state will be something completely new, however, not merely a restoration of what once existed in the past. Ronnie Rombs<sup>213</sup> considers that Augustine may have believed in a type of apokatastasis. Such an idea is linked to earlier concepts, drawn from Plotinus, of the soul having 'fallen' from a better place, and that it is to this place the soul will return. Rombs advises, however, that Augustine did not mean the same thing as Plotinus when he alludes to the fallen soul. According to Rombs Augustine understood the phrase 'heaven of heaven'<sup>214</sup> to be 'the eternal home from which we have fallen and to which by the grace of God we strive to return.'<sup>215</sup> This place is described by Augustine in Sermon 259 as being in some way

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<sup>211</sup> Easter Hymn, words by G. R. Woodward.

<sup>212</sup> 'The one thing he wished to teach us, by showing himself alive in the body after his resurrection, was that we should believe in the resurrection of the dead.' Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Sermon 243.3 p. 90.

<sup>213</sup> R.J. Rombs, *Saint Augustine & the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O'Connell and His Critics* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

<sup>214</sup> The phrase 'heaven of heaven' comes from Psalm 113:6 and is discussed by Augustine in *Confessions* book 12.

<sup>215</sup> Rombs, *Saint Augustine & the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O'Connell and His Critics* p. 52.



outside time, and there is also a reference to the seventh and eighth days, terms which have been explained above.<sup>216</sup> Ramelli argues that Augustine originally adopted Origen's view on apokatastasis but rejected this later in life.<sup>217</sup>

The idea of apokatastasis has implications for people with congenital disabilities. Questions arise as to whether someone who has been born with an abnormality with genetic causes, such as Down's Syndrome, would have the correct number of chromosomes in a world restored to as it was in the Garden of Eden. Such questions are unanswerable, but by asking them we begin to investigate other important questions about what it means to be made in God's image and likeness, what it means to be human and what God's intentions were for the world he created. When Jesus was asked 'why was this man born blind?' (John 9:1-3) he answers with the insistence that it was not because of sin, but to glorify the works of God. This question is discussed by Augustine in Tractate 44, a sermon on John chapter 9. Augustine does not dwell on the matter of sin, original or otherwise, being to blame, but uses the sermon to relate the idea of blindness to a lack of appreciation of the light of faith. Some of the questions raised here will be revisited in the chapter on the work of Jean Vanier who has also written a commentary on the Gospel of John.<sup>218</sup>

#### 1.4 No universal salvation

Ludlow suggests that there were two basic types of eschatology in Patristic times.<sup>219</sup> One was dualistic, supported by scriptural references to sheep and goats, where after death the fate of an individual was either eternal beatitude or eternal damnation. Proponents of this idea include Irenaeus and Basil, and Augustine seems to have adopted their view to a large extent. The second type, that proposed by Origen and adopted by Gregory of Nyssa, was universalistic, and involved punishment after death in order to purify individuals until they were restored to their original state. The implication is that eventually everyone will be so purified and therefore salvation is available to all. Augustine argued that only a few would be saved and that the vast majority, including Christians who were both devout and observant,

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<sup>216</sup> 'Therefore the eighth day signifies the new life at the end of the world; the seventh day, the future rest of the saints on this earth.' 'Then we return, as if to the beginning, for just as when seven days have passed, the eighth becomes the first, so after the seven periods of this transitory world have been spent and completed, we shall return to that immortal blessedness from which man fell.' Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Sermon 259.

<sup>217</sup> Ilaria LE Ramelli, "The Debate on Apokatastasis in Pagan and Christian Platonists: Martianus, Macrobius, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine," *Illinois Classical Studies*, no. 33-34 (2009). p. 222.

<sup>218</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*.

<sup>219</sup> M. Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

would not necessarily be destined for paradise in the next life. Such a view is understandable for a Bishop in his day. The Catholic Church has always maintained that some may not be saved.<sup>220</sup> Augustine was no different from the Greek Fathers, Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, St John Chrysostom, for example, in believing that the number of the damned would far exceed the number of the elect. As Dulles explains,

In Book 21 of his *City of God* he rebuts first the idea that all human beings are saved, then that all the baptized are saved, then that all baptized Catholics are saved, and finally that all baptized Catholics who persevere in the faith are saved. He seems to limit salvation to baptized believers who refrain from serious sin or who, after sinning, repent and are reconciled with God.<sup>221</sup>

This argument would have allowed Augustine to keep his congregation in a state of permanent vigilance, rather than allowing them to become complacent about their salvation. For Augustine it was much better to keep people on their guard, always conscious of their fallibility and human weaknesses, of their propensity to sin, and their need for repentance. He was also anxious to avoid over-confidence amongst those who had avoided the clutches of the Donatists, and remained true to the Catholic Church. He felt it was important to remain open to the possibility that even good Catholics cannot be guaranteed a place in heaven. This will be considered again when the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is discussed in chapter 4.

Augustine's use of the story about Jesus saying that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God' (Matt 19:23, Mark 10:24, Luke 18:25) gives other indications about his views on universal salvation, or the unlikelihood of this. In the exposition of Psalm 132<sup>222</sup> Augustine discusses the question of the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom by reminding his readers of 1 Tm 6:17 ('Instruct the rich of this world not to be high-minded'). He has already mentioned the camel and eye of needle passage, which concludes with the words 'things that are impossible for human beings are easy for God' (Lk 18:27) and then goes on to use Paul's letter to Timothy to explain how the rich can be admitted if they are humble. He reminds them of the story of Dives and Lazarus<sup>223</sup> and then says that rich people should remember this story and follow the advice of

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<sup>220</sup> SJ Dulles, A. Cardinal, and R.P. Imbelli, "Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007," (2008). p. 37. This lecture was entitled 'The Population of Hell'.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>222</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*, ed. B. Ramsey, trans. M. Boulding (New City Press, 2004). p. 175.

<sup>223</sup> Luke 16:19-31

Paul to ‘be rich in good works, give readily and share what they have’. (1 Tm 6: 18)

Augustine does not despise the rich or say that they are doomed to be like Dives. Instead they too can be saved if they use their wealth wisely to help the poor.

The same topic occurs in the Exposition of Ps 51, where he says the problem for the rich is not their wealth but their avarice. He reminds his listeners that the poor man Lazarus was taken to the arms of Abraham, who was himself a rich man. ‘This shows that it is not riches that make a person guilty. A poor man rests in the embrace of a rich man – or would it be truer to say that both are rich in God, both poor in greed.’<sup>224</sup> He is warning the poor not to be complacent here, ‘for you must not disparage the rich indiscriminately, nor must you think yourself secure just because you are hard up. If we may not rely on riches, much less may we rely on poverty; our only reliance is on the living God.’<sup>225</sup> So for Augustine’s congregation listening to this sermon there was not going to be an easy way into heaven, neither for the rich nor for the poor. Nevertheless there is no universal condemnation of the financially rich either, so long as they focus their hearts on God.

## 2. How Augustine deals with practical issues

As has been noted, Augustine did not write a specific work on the subject of eschatology. This section will, therefore, consider three different ways in which his eschatology can be found in the way he communicated his ideas in different contexts. The first is from his correspondence with a fellow Bishop, Hesychius. The second is from letter he wrote to two bereaved women. The third is from his homilies during the Easter season, this being an important time for the newly baptised who continued their instruction in the faith. These three different areas give different pictures of Augustine’s thought. Understandably, when writing to a fellow Bishop, he was concerned to explain clear doctrine, since he knew that Hesychius would consider the advice of Augustine seriously. When writing to the bereaved he takes a different approach, and shows a more pastoral, caring side to his views. It would not be appropriate, one feels, to emphasise strict doctrines to someone who needed comfort and reassurance that their loved-one was in a better place. It would be inappropriate at the funeral suggest that not everyone will be saved and that not all are destined for heaven. The Easter homilies take another view, since it was important to make sure that those recent converts did

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<sup>224</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 51-72*, ed. J.E. Rotelle, trans. M. Boulding (New City Press, 2001). p. 27.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

not become complacent or lax in their practice of the faith. The faithful needed to be reminded that their place in heaven was not guaranteed, merely because they had taken the important step of being baptised.

### 2.1 Correspondence with Hesychius

Augustine's world was one of turmoil and anxiety about the future. Constantine's conversion brought an end to the persecution of Christians and martyrdom, but for the Christians of North Africa there were still plenty of reasons to fear what might happen in the future. The belief that the end of the world was nigh permeated the thoughts of many of Augustine's contemporaries. The question arises about whether Augustine's views were in contrast to those of his peers or whether he represented the majority. It could be that the normal view at that time was to support millenarianism, the belief that the end of the world was imminent, something which arose from the way the book of Revelation prophecy of a one thousand year reign of Christ was interpreted. One aspect of this involved a belief that the days of the world were numbered in seven one-thousand-year blocks, and that the final age, as described in Revelation, was soon to begin. Signs of this were interpreted as being those of earthquakes, and natural disasters as well as more positive signs, such as the Conversion of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, to Christianity. Such belief was partly due to the predictions of Julius Africanus, who dated the end of the world to sometime in the 400s.<sup>226</sup> At that time it was not uncommon to look for signs of the end of the world, trying to interpret the book of Revelation in ways that applied to the events of the day. In 410 the invasion of Rome was taken to be a portent that the end days were near, added to which there was a solar eclipse, an earthquake and a drought, all things which turned people's minds to the apocalypse.

Millenarianism arose for a number of reasons. One of these was the attempts made by theologians to explain the scriptures, and in particular the book of Revelation, also known as the book of the Apocalypse. This book predicted that Jesus would return to earth to bring about the end of the world, and to launch a new creation, following the destruction of all that was evil in the old world. In the early days of the Church, perhaps until the end of the first century, Christians believed that this would happen in their lifetimes. Gradually as ordinary life went on, and the end of the world did not come to pass, believers wondered how the prophecy of John, in the book of Revelation, could be understood. The idea of the 'cosmic

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<sup>226</sup> Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity. From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo." This is also mentioned by Ralph Mathisen in Fitzgerald and Cavadini, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*.

week'<sup>227</sup> arose from making comparisons with the days of creation and the seventh day rest and these images were taken alongside an understanding that a day could be considered as a thousand years, by using the text of the second letter of Peter and a line from Psalm 90.<sup>228</sup> Thus the end of the world was expected to come at the beginning of the year 6000, or thereabouts. The estimation was made, by Julius Africanus, amongst others, that Jesus was born 5,500 years after the world began, thus the key date was the year 500 AD. This would be the beginning of the final thousand years, promised in the book of Revelation.<sup>229</sup> The conversion of the Emperor Constantine gave further support to the millenarian view, since his conversion was taken to mark the beginning of the end, as prophesied by Isaiah.<sup>230</sup>

Augustine's exegesis of scriptural passages such as Apocalypse 20, which is covered in detail in a letter to Hesychius<sup>231</sup> where Augustine explains how the two resurrections need to be understood to avoid mistaking the signs and portents of the day.<sup>232</sup> In his correspondence with this fellow bishop, Augustine says that there are three possibilities with regard to belief about the end of the world: <sup>233</sup>

1. Those who insist that the Lord is coming very soon. They are likely to be disappointed and they may damage the faith of others, who see that it does not happen, and then stop believing the Lord will come at all.
2. Those who hope for the Lord's coming, but do not expect it to be soon. They may have a happy surprise, and will learn patience.

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<sup>227</sup> Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity. From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo." p. 153.

<sup>228</sup> 'With the Lord one day is like a thousand years' (2 Peter 3:8) and 'For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.' (Psalm 90:4)

<sup>229</sup> The footnotes of Paula Fredriksen's article give a wealth of detail on the sources for these interpretations of the book of Revelation in Patristic times.

<sup>230</sup> Discussion of the millenarian ideas of Eusebius can be found in M.J. Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Clarendon Press, 1999). The author points out that Eusebius rejected a literal Biblical millenarianism in favour of a more allegorical interpretation. Eusebius regarded Constantine's conversion as something which supports an allegory of the Church as the New Jerusalem. This can be seen particularly in the way Eusebius interprets Isaiah 66:10-13.

<sup>231</sup> Hesychius was 'the bishop of Salona, near Split, who was metropolitan of the church of Dalmatia.' B. Ramsey, R.J. Teske, and Augustinian Heritage Institute, *Letters 156-210: Epistulae Ii* (New City Press, 2004). p. 320.

<sup>232</sup> A. Augustine, W. Parsons, and R.B. Eno, *Letters* (Fathers of the Church, 1951). Letter 199. This letter amounts to 54 chapters, and is a detailed exegesis of a number of scriptural references to the end of the world. Hesychius had written to Augustine asking him if the events of the times were signs that the end of the world was imminent. Augustine replies that it is not for us to know, and debates, in this lengthy letter, various aspects of those signs.

<sup>233</sup> Although the first letter Hesychius wrote is lost, Augustine's reply is Letter 197, and Hesychius' reply to this is Letter 198, with Letter 199 being Augustine final reply to the debate. The letters were written in 418 and 419.

3. The one who admits he does not know which of the above is right. He ‘hopes for the one, is resigned to the other, and is wrong in neither of them.’<sup>234</sup>

It is typical of Augustine that he avoids sensationalism and instead gently suggests that the third of these options is his preferred way. He refuses to get caught up in ‘end of the world’ speculation but is tactful and sensitive when dealing with those who disagree with his views. He is not going to tell Hesychius what to think or believe, but is calm and rational in pointing out the pitfalls of the first two viewpoints. Perhaps Augustine adopts the view that it is more important to support his flock in their daily lives rather than speculating about the date of the end of the world.

## 2.2 Dealing with bereavement

Augustine’s responses to bereavements, both his own and those of others, are sometimes indicative of his understanding of what lies beyond the grave. In the *Confessions* extract, at the beginning of this chapter, Augustine addresses two key questions which can be summarised as being about mindfulness and about recognition. By mindfulness is meant the capacity to call to mind someone we have known in the past and recognition means the ability to recognise the person we have called to mind. He is addressing the very important question of what has become of his friend, Nebridius, who has died. It is characteristic of the pastoral care and concern that Augustine the Bishop had for his flock, that he is ready to try to answer their questions about the next world, about life beyond the grave in a way that goes beyond merely stating the official Church attitude. In his later work, *City of God*, he debates the more technical issues of what form the resurrected bodies will take. In *Confessions*, however, his observations are more personal. One can discern a very human aspect to what Augustine is saying and yet he only partially answers the second question, that of recognition. Augustine is sure that Nebridius will not have forgotten his friend Augustine, but he makes no mention of whether Nebridius will recognise his friend Augustine in the future or even if Augustine will recognise Nebridius.

Thus our identity is bound up, not only with bodies, but also with our relationships. Questions of recognition, including the ‘how will you know me?’ one from the learning-disabled girl, are asked by those engaged in relationships. It would not be enough to recognise merely the body of the person we once knew. We want to be able to recognise the

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<sup>234</sup> Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*. p. 135, quoting from Letter 199.54

whole person, which includes all our memories of that person from their earthly life. The ‘life of the world to come’ will depend on individuals being able to recognise one another. This is something Augustine touches on when writing letters of condolence, as he does to the widow Italica<sup>235</sup> and to Sapida<sup>236</sup> whose brother, Timotheus, has died. Augustine reassures both ladies that death is not the end of their relationship with the deceased. To Italica he writes

We are confident that we have not lost those of ours who are departed, but have sent them on ahead, where they will be dearer to us to the extent that they will be better known and where they will be lovable without any fear of losing them.<sup>237</sup>

This passage indicates that Augustine was not merely concerned with comforting the bereaved by reminding them that they should have hope, unlike the heathens, of a life beyond this present one. He also indicates that he believes that in that future life we will know those for whom we mourn, and know them even better than we did in their earthly life. Because of this greater, deeper knowledge, we will love them even more than we do now.

For the love by which Timothy loved and loves Sapida has not perished because those things, which you mourn as having been removed from you, have passed away over time. That love remains, preserved in its repository, and is hidden with Christ in the Lord.<sup>238, 239</sup>

Augustine then continues to give examples of loving things which we cannot see, and how we can be confident that those who have died are in a safe place in the ‘storehouses of heaven.’<sup>240</sup>

The influence of martyrs in the early church would also have influenced the way Augustine dealt with issues of bodily resurrection. For some people the scattered bones of the martyrs would have presented a challenge as presumably it might be difficult for all those bones, scattered far and wide in order to be venerated as relics, to be re-assembled into one body at

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<sup>235</sup> Augustine, *Letters: Volume II (83-130)* (Catholic University of America Press, 1953). Letter 92. It is in this letter that Augustine criticises those who think that in heaven we will see God with our bodily eyes, as this implies that God has a body, which he does not. He suggests to Italica that she shows the letter to anyone who tries to argue differently.

<sup>236</sup> Augustine, Parsons, and Eno, *Letters*. Letter 263.

<sup>237</sup> Augustine, *Letters: Volume II (83-130)*. Letter 92.

<sup>238</sup> Augustine, Parsons, and Eno, *Letters*. Letter 263, 2 p. 209.

<sup>239</sup> The phrase ‘hidden with Christ in God’ comes from Col 3:3.

<sup>240</sup> Augustine, Parsons, and Eno, *Letters*. Letter 263, 2 p. 210.

the resurrection. Some of the ways that Augustine dealt with such issues are considered in a later section.

### 2.3 Easter sermons

An example of how Augustine approaches the post-resurrection stories is his Sermon 248, which is an exegesis of John 21: 1-14. This story describes the disciples fishing, catching 153 fish although the net is not broken and Jesus later cooks them breakfast. Augustine was not unusual at this time in being interested in the relevance of particular numbers. His fascination with the number 153 frequently appears in sermons where he explains to his congregation the significance of this number. The number 153 has mathematical significance, since it is the sum of the first seventeen counting numbers. Seventeen is obtained from the sum of ten, for the Ten Commandments and seven, for the seven days of creation. Sermon 250 ends with the command 'Count the seventeen numbers from one to seventeen in such a way that you add them all, and you will arrive at the number 153. What are you awaiting from me? Count for yourselves.'<sup>241</sup> This may explain why Augustine suggests that the number of the elect was fixed; whereas countless multitudes are in the Church, only a fixed number will be saved. Here is Augustine's soteriology, starkly contrasting with that of Rahner<sup>242</sup> or any of the other theologians who believe in universal salvation. It might also be relevant that the disciples did not recognise Jesus at first, so different was the appearance of his post-resurrection body. Yet, after a while, they did realise that it was Jesus who was cooking them breakfast. Could this indicate that recognition in the eschaton will happen through seemingly ordinary, everyday events?

Another analogy can be found in the Easter sermons where Augustine considers the differences between the pre-resurrection fishing story and the post-resurrection one.<sup>243</sup> In this story the nets were not broken and this signifies that in the eschaton there will be no schisms. In the pre-resurrection story the nets were broken, an indication that in that time the Jews and Gentiles were separate, whereas after the Resurrection of Christ, such division will be no more. As Augustine explains:

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<sup>241</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Sermon 250.

<sup>242</sup> Ludlow argues that both Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner believe in Universal salvation, whereas Augustine, who was influenced by Gregory, did not. A discussion of Augustine's soteriology is beyond the scope of this work, however. Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*.

<sup>243</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Those sermons for the Easter Season are particularly relevant.



For, in the future, there will be a gathering together of saints, but there will not be the divisions and separations of heretics; there will be peace and there will be perfect unity.<sup>244</sup>

These ideas illustrate the two conflicting threads, firstly that not everyone will be saved, and secondly that there will be perfect unity. Augustine does not seem to be aware of this contradiction. This could be because he adopts a different role when he is consoling his bereaved friends, and encouraging his congregation from when he is writing theological books, such as *City of God*. The latter is an abstract, objective account of the world to come whereas the former acknowledges the very real pastoral needs of his community.

Another interesting issue which appears in an Easter sermon<sup>245</sup> is the question of recognition where Augustine assures his congregation that they will recognise everyone, not only the people they have known in this life but others as well.

You will know them all. Those who are there won't recognise each other just because they see faces; mutual recognition will come from a greater kind of knowledge. They will see each other, but much more perfectly, in the same way as prophets are accustomed to see things here. They will see in a divine manner, since they will be full of God.<sup>246</sup>

This is interesting as Augustine is suggesting that we will see each other, but even better than we do now. There is also a footnote, from the translator, to suggest that the prophets he refers to may be the visionaries of Augustine's own time, people who were blessed with particular insights, and not just the prophets of the bible.

### 3. Key Concepts at the Micro Level

This section moves into more specific ideas where Augustine is addressing particular details of the resurrection at the micro level. He addresses questions about what resurrected bodies will look like and how they will function. He is concerned with answering the challenges of those who do not believe in the resurrection of the body, answering their objections in ways appropriate to his audience. It should be remembered that some of the objections his opponents raised were because of relics of Platonistic thought, and a belief that the body was a thing to be cast off as an encumbrance to the soul on its journey into eternity. This section looks at the fear of corruption, the fate of individual body parts, the interaction of the physical

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid. Sermon 250.

<sup>245</sup> Sermon 243. Ibid. p. 92.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

and the spiritual, and the challenge of how to understand if and how a vision of God will be attainable in the life hereafter.

### 3.1 Fear of corruption

One factor which influenced Augustine's approach to the resurrection was the prevailing belief that the real enemy of the body is corruption, in the physical sense, which recognises that the earthly body is subject to deterioration and change. This led Augustine to define heaven as a place where there would be an absence of corruption. For Augustine, therefore, heaven would be found 'after the corruptible body, death, and sin have passed away, and when eternal felicity in an incorruptible body is granted to them by God.'<sup>247</sup> In *City of God* Augustine insists that at the resurrection 'all ugliness must disappear, all weakness, all sluggishness, all corruption, and anything that is inconsistent with that kingdom ...'<sup>248</sup> This description echoes the 'no deformity' idea found in Sermon 243,<sup>249</sup> one of the Easter sermons. The idea of freedom from disability is also found in *Faith and the Creed*, where Augustine describes what the final statement of the creed means in terms of liberation from all that weighs us down in our present lives.

The body, then, will rise again according to the tenets of the Christian faith – a faith that cannot lead us astray. If this belief seems incredible to anyone, that is because he is thinking of the flesh as it is now and not as it will be in the future, for at the moment of its spiritual transformation it will no longer be flesh and blood but only a body.<sup>250</sup>

Here, Augustine is sympathetic towards those who cannot understand the doctrine of resurrection of the body. He explains that it is important to understand the difference between the bodies we have now and the bodies we will have in the future. This distinction is something which needs to be remembered every time Augustine uses the term 'resurrection of the body'. His explanation continues with the distinction that 'in the heavenly realm there is no flesh, only pure and radiant bodies, which the Apostle calls 'spiritual'.'<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> H.A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (Columbia Univ Pr, 1963). pp. 60-61.

<sup>248</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.20 p. 1064.

<sup>249</sup> In this sermon Augustine affirms the resurrection of the body saying that 'all bodies are to be restored whole and entire.' *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*.

<sup>250</sup> *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects* (Fathers of the Church, inc., 1955). *Faith and the Creed* 10, 24 p. 343.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. *Faith and the Creed* 10, 24 p. 344.

Then he takes his readers step-by-step through an explanation of how the transformation that is the resurrection of the flesh is possible, ending with the encouraging picture of what eternal life will mean for believers.

When the resurrection of the body will have become a reality and we are freed from the exigencies of a temporal existence, we shall experience the full enjoyment of life eternal with a love unspeakable and a constancy that shall never fail.<sup>252</sup>

This also conveys the idea of escape from the bonds of time, showing that it is not just corruption (of the flesh) that is the problem we have in this earthly life, but also the fact that we are tied to time.

Augustine's emphasis on corruption as the enemy of the body is probably something he developed because of his regular exposure to corruption, both in literal, natural terms and also in the metaphorical sense. He lived in a world which was far less sterile than our own. His view of freedom from corruption can be further understood from this passage, from *City of God*:

Thus in that blazing up, as I call it, of the fires of the world, the qualities of the corruptible elements which were appropriate for our corruptible bodies will utterly perish in the burning, and our substance itself will acquire the qualities which will be suited, by a miraculous transformation, to our immortal bodies, with the obvious purpose of furnishing the world, now renewed for the better, with a fitting population of human beings, renewed for the better even in their flesh.<sup>253</sup>

The word transformation (in Latin the phrase used is *mirabili mutatione*) is used here and this seems to be a useful all-embracing term, describing what can be referred to as the transformational model of the eschaton, at least as it applies to bodies. With new, 'miraculously mutated' bodies we will be free from corruption, a reassuring idea, so long as the transformation retains the essential elements of the person, of the individual, so that they can be recognised by those who knew them in their old, corruptible bodies. Augustine deals with this by describing the resurrected body as spiritualised, something which is discussed further below,<sup>254</sup> and what this means is approached through practical considerations of

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid. *Faith and the Creed* 10, 24 p. 345.

<sup>253</sup> *City of God*. 20.16 p. 927.

<sup>254</sup> Augustine uses some clever examples of how things can float even though they are heavy (e.g. wood, lead vessels, etc.) which are used to support the idea that things can rise above their natural state. He concludes this little section by saying that, 'God will grant a wondrous ease of movement, a wondrous lightness. Not without reason have those bodies been termed 'spiritual.' [...] Why, then, is it called a spiritual body, my dearly beloved, except because it will obey the directions of the spirit? Nothing in yourself will be at variance with yourself; nothing in yourself will rebel against yourself.' *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. p. 270-271, sermon 242.

bodily parts as well as through theological reflection. Although we turn first to a discussion of the physical aspects of resurrection, the spiritual is closely interwoven.

### 3.2 Bodily parts

In the final chapter of the final book of *City of God* Augustine gave descriptions of what he imagined heaven to be like. His description can be considered as a summary of his position, one where he uses the language of metaphor and analogy rather than a description using literal terms. Here he is writing about the kind of bodies he expects people will have in the eschaton, though he is also cautious about making predictions as to the exact nature of bodies in heaven.

All the limbs and organs of the body, no longer subject to decay, the parts which we now see assigned to various essential functions, will then be freed from all such constraint, since full, secure, certain and eternal felicity will have displaced necessity; and all those parts will contribute to the praise of God.<sup>255</sup>

Here Augustine is clear that the parts of the body will remain, even though they are no longer needed for the same purpose they had in our earthly lives. Although he cannot describe how those resurrected bodies will move, he does say that ‘everything there will be lovely in its form, and lovely in motion and in rest, for anything that is not lovely will be excluded.’<sup>256</sup> This use of the word ‘lovely’ is an example of what might be considered the subjective nature of his description, since ‘lovely’ might mean whatever the writer chooses it to mean. What is lovely to one person may offend another. Augustine then describes what these incorruptible bodies will be doing while they are in this state of bliss.

He will be the goal of all our longings; and we shall see him for ever; we shall love him without satiety; we shall praise him without wearying. This will be the duty, the delight, the activity of all, shared by all who share the life of eternity.<sup>257</sup>

*Ipse finis erit desideriorum nostrorum, qui sine fine videbitur, sine fastidio amabitur, sine fatigatione laudabitur. Hoc munus, hic affectus, hic actus profecto erit omnibus, sicut ipsa vita aeterna, communis.*

The three verbs, *videbitur*, *amabitur*, and *laudabitur*, are in fact in the passive mood. The significance of the passive here is that Augustine does not say that we shall see, we shall

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<sup>255</sup> *City of God*. 22.30 p. 1087.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. p. 1088. In Latin this is ‘*Tamen et motus et status, sicut ipsa species, decens erit, quicumque erit, ubi quod non decebit, not erit.*’ Another translation uses ‘seemly’ rather than ‘lovely’ for *decens*. R. Dyson et al., *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). p. 1178.

<sup>257</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. p. 1088.

love, we shall praise. Instead he says that 'he will be seen, he will be loved and he will be praised.'<sup>258</sup> The emphasis is on God and not on human beings. We are passive recipients of the divine presence, rather than active agents who choose to enjoy the beatific vision and choose to love and praise God. These are all indications of the things Augustine considered to be features of heavenly repose. One puzzling part of this, for Augustine, is the idea of seeing God. In other writings he spends considerable time debating whether or not we shall see God and the section on Vision, below, will investigate this aspect in more detail.

Meanwhile Augustine engages in debates about the body, what the body will be like in the eschaton, how bodily resurrection can be envisaged, how practical difficulties will be dealt with, such as the parts of the body lost through amputation, and other mechanical details.<sup>259</sup> Augustine's answers to these questions are comprehensive, detailed and yet strange to the modern reader. Perhaps he answers questions which no longer concern us, or perhaps modern medicine has given us a different perspective, now that we accept heart-transplants and blood transfusions as commonplace.

In the *City of God*<sup>260</sup> Augustine has much to say on the mechanical details of the resurrection of the body. He spends considerable time in chapter 19 of Book 22 discussing the problems surrounding the parts of the body as they are restored at the resurrection. Questions concern him about parts of the body which have been lost by being cut off, such as hair or fingernails. He debates this issue in great detail, trying to establish rules for what might happen to our lost hair and nails when our bodies are resurrected on the last day. His conclusion is as complex as his debating and seems to revolve around rearrangement of parts so that nothing is lost. Although these questions may seem ridiculous or pedantic to us now, they were necessary for Augustine to consider as he developed his eschatological thinking. One reason why these questions were necessary for Augustine was because the bones of the martyrs, much venerated by the early Church, had been widely scattered about the known world, something which led to concerns about their bodies at the resurrection. Another reason was due to the influence of Platonist ideas that the body was something we should wish to be rid of, because of its corruption, and burdensome nature.

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<sup>258</sup> My translation of the Latin is a little simplistic. In fact *videbitur* can have several meanings, such as 'he will be understood, reflected upon, perceived,' all of which have different shades of meaning from simply seeing God. English, also, allows for different shades of meaning with the word 'see'.

<sup>259</sup> It could be that Augustine is answering two different questions here, one about how an earthly body which is ugly would be transformed and another about how missing bodily parts will be retrieved.

<sup>260</sup> Particularly in *City of God* 22,19.

Augustine takes the approach of using analogies and metaphors,<sup>261</sup> when he is addressing specific questions about resurrected bodies. The cult of martyrs, whereby the bones and other bodily parts of those who had been killed for their faith were distributed amongst the faithful for veneration, raised serious problems when it came to the idea of the resurrection of those bodies. People might reasonably ask how this could come about, since their earthly remains might be scattered across the known world. To address such issues Augustine uses the Statue analogy.<sup>262</sup> This analogy enables Augustine to explain some of the awkward aspects of this idea of re-assembly of parts, such as what will happen to the parts of the body that have been removed, such as hair and nails, and what happens to someone who has been eaten by cannibals.<sup>263</sup> Augustine explains all this in a lengthy passage in Book 22 of *City of God*, using the analogy of a potter with clay, whereby the body can be re-formed from existing parts.

An artist who has for some reason produced an ugly statue can recast it and make it beautiful, removing the ugliness without any loss of material substance. [...] If a human artist can do this, what are we to think of the Almighty Artist? Can he not remove all deformities of the human body [...]?<sup>264</sup>

This passage suggests that for Augustine the Almighty Artist would have no difficulty in removing physical disabilities without changing the essential human characteristics of that person, without changing their nature. The whole, complete person would be rendered beautiful without loss, not only of material substance, but without loss of anything that was

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<sup>261</sup> It may be helpful to clarify the difference between a metaphor and an analogy when they are used in connection with God. This is something which Thomas Aquinas discusses in Question 13 of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*. A metaphor is found when a quality which can be applied to created beings is used about God. An example of this might be 'God is a rock'. The sense here is that God is not literally a rock, but that God has those qualities of rocks, steadfastness, dependability, etc., which humans can recognise. In contrast to this, the analogy 'God is love' applies a quality to God that can only imperfectly be applied to creatures. For further discussion of this see Chapter 6 of R.M. McNerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Catholic Univ of Amer Pr, 1996). When Augustine uses the statue analogy he is using it in the correct sense of something about human life applied to human life. In a sermon Augustine indicates that he is aware of the use of metaphor, although he is not convinced that his listeners understand this. Augustine laboriously explains that 'in parables and comparisons one thing can be called by many names.' Saint Augustine et al., *Sermons (51-94) on the New Testament* (New City Press, 1991). Sermon 73.2, p. 292.

<sup>262</sup> While Marrou suggests this is borrowed from St John Chrysostom, Marrou, "The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values." Walker Bynum argues that it comes from Tertullian. C.W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (Columbia Univ Pr, 1995). p. 94.

<sup>263</sup> Augustine was not the only one to try to address issues of bodily resurrection by means of analogies. Gregory of Nyssa addresses the problem in a homily where he uses the idea of an amalgam of silver and gold which is welded together by an artist. This is reminiscent of Augustine's 'statue' analogy and Gregory uses this to explain how the soul is not lost when the physical body decays. Gregory argues that 'nothing hinders the soul from being present to the elements of the body both when they are mixed together by their combination and when they are dissolved by their separation. [...] According to the same reasoning the intellectual nature of the soul appears in the combination of the elements and does not disappear when they are dissolved, but it remains in them.' Gregory of Nyssa, *The Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. C.P. Roth (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993). p. 28.

<sup>264</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.19 pp. 1060-61.

important to their identity. Some other issues raised by this rhetorical question will be considered below, in the section on applications to those with disabilities. It could also apply to those with the deficiencies of age, such as hearing loss, or joint replacement, as well as conditions such as Alzheimer's, where the brain no longer functions as it once did.

### 3.3 Spirit and Flesh

In 411 Augustine preached a sermon so long that the translator, Edmund Hill, describes it as 'monstrously long'.<sup>265</sup> The previous sermon to this, sermon 361, had covered the arguments for believing in the resurrection of the body and this one continues the theme by considering what that resurrected body will be like. Sermon 362 covers a number of issues, including exegesis of some key scriptural passages. One of these is 1 Cor 15, which includes the most important question, 'How do the dead rise? With what sort of body are they coming?' (1 Cor 15:35). Augustine considers, in some detail, Paul's reply to this rhetorical question, which was to say that 'flesh and blood cannot gain possession of the kingdom of God' (1 Cor 15:50).

And he wants to indicate what he meant by flesh and blood, that he doesn't mean the very fact of being a body, but is signifying liability to decay by the expression, "flesh and blood," a liability that will not then be experienced. The body, you see, that is not subject to decay is not properly called flesh and blood, but simply body.<sup>266</sup>

In order to explain what this implies, Augustine then turns to the Gospel story where Jesus is asked about the woman who had married seven brothers in turn as each one died and who would be her husband in the resurrection. Jesus' reply, that 'in the resurrection they marry neither husbands nor wives' (Mt 22:30), indicates several things, says Augustine. First there is no need for procreation, the purpose of marriage for Augustine, since there will be no more death, and therefore no more need to reproduce. Secondly the answer shows that there will still be males and females, which means there will be recognisable bodies. Thirdly it is clear that the resurrected bodies will be those of angels, and angels do not marry.

The bodies we will have are also prefigured by Christ's resurrection, as Augustine explains, 'in what specific form we are to rise again, he has shown us himself in his own

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<sup>265</sup> Footnote to sermon 362, page 267 of *Sermons on Various Subjects*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 10, *The Works of Saint Augustine : A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1990).

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. Sermon 362.17 p. 253.

resurrection.<sup>267</sup> Augustine also warns his listeners not to speculate on what the life of the angels will be like.

But if the life of the angels is a secret, none should inquire further; else they may go astray and not reach what they are inquiring about, but what they have made up for themselves, because in that case their inquiries are being made hastily, and they are in too much of a hurry.<sup>268</sup>

Here Augustine seems to be warning us not to come to hasty conclusions about the life of angels, and maybe, also, not to wonder about it at all. The same kind of admonition can be found here,

So then, brothers and sisters, none of you should now be asking with misguided shrewdness what sort of shape bodies will have in the resurrection of the dead, what sort of movements, what sort of gait.<sup>269</sup>

It is easy to think that Augustine might not approve of the research question being considered here, although perhaps he was just warning his mixed congregation against futile speculation.<sup>270</sup> Later he does remark that it is easier to say what will not happen in heaven than to say what will happen. We will not sleep, because sleep is only needed because of our physical and spiritual frailty. We will not eat, because it will not be necessary to sustain our bodies with food. There will be no death, and no fear of death. But he also reassures his listeners that there will be no boredom, either, and in a passage that shows his sense of humour, assures his congregation that they will not get bored by singing Amen and Alleluia all the time.

Another consideration is the distinction between the first and the second resurrection. This can be seen in this passage, also from sermon 362.

You see, there is indeed a resurrection according to faith, whereby everyone who believes rises again in the spirit. In fact it is those who have first risen again in the spirit that will have a good second resurrection in the body. Because those who haven't previously risen again in spirit through faith, will not rise again to that change

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid. Sermon 362.19 p. 255.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. Sermon 362.27 p. 263.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> 'The community at Hippo was, in general, a diverse group of Catholics who came to church more or less faithfully [...]. Hence, they were young and old, culturally diverse, those who could read and those who could not, poor and well-off, married, single and widowed, ascetics and consecrated virgins, and so forth.' E. Hill and A. Fitzgerald, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* (New City Press, 2009). p. 26.



in the body, whereby all liability to decay and to perishing will be taken away and swallowed up, but to that other penal kind of wholeness or completeness.<sup>271</sup>

There is a reference here to what will happen to the resurrected bodies of those who have not been baptised. This is not the key point, however. Of greater significance is the idea that the ‘liability to decay and to perishing’ is removed from the bodies of the blessed. This explains St Paul’s statement about flesh and blood not possessing the kingdom of God, since it is the decaying part of the flesh that has been removed. Some of the difficulties here may be because of Paul’s use of terms which have different meanings in Greek from those understood by Augustine and his listeners, who would have been conversing in Latin. A digression to discuss two such words, *soma* and *sarx*, will be illustrative at this point.

Dunn points out<sup>272</sup> that *soma*, as used by Paul, had several shades of meaning and so the English word ‘body’ does not convey the meaning so well. Dunn prefers the term ‘embodiment’ as it suggests a process rather than a fixed noun. In this way *soma* ‘denotes the person embodied in a particular environment. It is the means by which the person relates to that environment, and vice versa.’<sup>273</sup> This means that the body is relational, in relationship with other embodied beings, implying that the resurrected body will also be relational. As Dunn explains, the present body is embodied in a way that is appropriate for the earthly life, whereas the ‘embodiment of the resurrection body will be different, an embodiment appropriate to the world of Spirit, beyond death.’<sup>274</sup>

Unfortunately when it comes to understanding Paul’s use of the word *sarx* there is no simple way to summarise all the different shades of meaning this word can have. It is often translated as ‘flesh’ but Dunn argues that this is misleading as it can imply something base and sinful. He outlines a range of meanings of the word ranging from something completely neutral, such as the physical body, through something which is weak and mortal, to something which is the enemy of the Spirit and a source of corruption. As Dunn explains,

The spectrum runs from human relationships and needs, through human weakness and desires, through human imperfection and corruption, to the fully deprecatory and condemnatory tone of the *sarx-pneuma* antithesis.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 10. Sermon 362.23 p. 259.

<sup>272</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Burns & Oates, 2003). pp 55-61 for Paul on *soma* and pp. 62-70 for *sarx*.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

In this way Dunn argues that *sarx* is an indicator of the human condition, with all its frailties, and something that can be summed up as ‘human nature.’ When this is used to translate *sarx* the idea of leaving behind, in the eschaton, our frail human nature and receiving, instead, a transformed relational embodiment, can allow for the recognition of those who we knew in their earthly life, once the limitations of that life are absent, but the relational part is still present. It is as though the positive things that come from being humans in relationship with other humans can be retained, while the negative things, caused by human frailty, are removed. Those moments when observers can recognise the work of God in the midst of human interactions, as when they see Mother Teresa helping the poor, or Jean Vanier working with people who are cognitively impaired, are the relational parts (*soma*) which will be preserved while the failures (*sarx*) are lost.

The distinction made by St Paul between *sarx* and *soma*<sup>276</sup> is adopted by Augustine as that between *caro* and *corpus*. *Caro* is worldly flesh, subject to corruption whereas *corpus* is the ‘human body that God created in his own image’ which is the one that will be resurrected. Augustine in Sermon 155, says ‘Take away death, and the body is good. Let death, the last enemy, be removed, and my flesh will be forever my friend. Nobody, after all, ever hated his own flesh.’<sup>277</sup> Augustine shows here that it is the perishability of the body that is the source of trouble, not the body itself. A similar idea is found in Faith and the Creed, where he explains:

Rise again, therefore, the body will, according to the Christian faith, which is incapable of deceiving. And if this appears incredible to any one, [it is because] he looks simply to what the flesh is at present, while he fails to consider of what nature it shall be hereafter. For at that time of angelic change it will no more be flesh and blood, but only body.<sup>278</sup>

He goes on to explain this distinction by giving examples of celestial, spiritual bodies which are different from terrestrial ones.

The spiritual flesh will thus be subject to the spirit, but it will be flesh, not spirit, just as the carnal spirit was subject to the flesh, and yet was spirit, not flesh.

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<sup>276</sup> Paul distinguishes between the word *sarx*, by which he means ‘flesh’ and *soma*, which means ‘body’ or the whole person. *Soma*, argues Dunn, is difficult to translate and he suggests that a better term is ‘embodiment’. See *ibid.* p. 56. See 1 Cor 15 for Paul’s discussion of the resurrection of the body.

<sup>277</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermons (148-183) on the New Testament*, ed. J.E. Rotelle, trans. E. Hill (New City Press, 1992), p. 93. Sermon 155. 15. For further discussion see Fitzgerald and Cavadini, *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, p. 105.

<sup>278</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. P. Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series, Volume Iii (Cosimo, 2007). *On Faith and the Creed* 10.24 p. 332.

*Erit ergo spiritui subdita caro spiritalis, sed tamen caro, non spiritus; sicut carni subditus fuit spiritus ipse carnalis, sed tamen spiritus, non caro.*<sup>279</sup>

In spite of the cumbersome language, the important message here is that it shows how Augustine might have imagined that the future, resurrected body will no longer be dominated by its flesh but by its spirit. The meaning seems to be that in heaven we will be as we are now, flesh and spirit, but flesh will be subservient to spirit. The significance of the spiritual body is that it is incorruptible and immortal, both qualities that were lacking in the fleshy body. Because the spirit will be dominant, the spiritual body will be incorruptible and immortal, two qualities which are lacking in the fleshy, the former body. What this description lacks is any information about the faculties of the spiritual body. In the next section one of those faculties, the sense perception of vision, is considered in detail.

### 3.4 Vision

One question to which Augustine turned his attention was how to interpret the Beatitude, 'Blest are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'<sup>280</sup> Seeing God implied not only that we would have eyes to see, but that God would have a body which could be seen. Early Christians held somewhat anthropomorphic views about God's body and it may be that this was as a result of the images from the book of Revelation which describes God seated on a throne. Augustine rebukes his listeners for thinking that God has a physical body like ours. In doing this perhaps Augustine was trying to correct a widely-held belief, based on incorrect interpretation of the Genesis passage about man being made in the image and likeness of God, that God is physical.<sup>281</sup>

In order to understand what Augustine meant when he referred to the vision of God it is useful to consider his ideas about vision. Augustine did not have the benefit of modern scientific understanding of the optical system. As was common in his time, he accepted Plato's extramission, or ray theory of vision. This theory, which was adopted also by Galen<sup>282</sup>, holds that rays of light are emitted from the eye towards the object being viewed. These rays were understood to form a connection between the viewer and the object and this

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<sup>279</sup> *City of God*. 22.21 p. 1064.

<sup>280</sup> Matt 5:8

<sup>281</sup> Perhaps this is an example of Hebrew Bible imagery permeating Christian thought. 'It has been a traditional Jewish belief that God is anthropomorphic (or better, humans theomorphic), and with some notable exceptions, late antique Jews rejected the metaphysic which demanded he be otherwise.' C.W. Griffin and D.L. Paulsen, "Augustine and the Corporeality of God," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 01 (2002). p. 98.

<sup>282</sup> A useful discussion of Galen's theory of vision can be found in F. Salmón, "Medieval Theories of Vision in the Medical Classroom," *Endeavour* 22, no. 3 (1998). pp. 125-6.

connection allowed the viewed object to influence the viewer.<sup>283</sup> It is clear from what he says in Sermon 362 that he understood vision as a process of extramission. Talking about the phrase of St Paul 'in the twinkling of an eye' (1 Cor 15:52), Augustine comments that 'by the twinkling of the eye he meant the emission of rays in order to observe something.'<sup>284</sup>

Not only did the extramission theory influence Augustine's understanding of vision, in the physical sense, it also influenced his ideas about the soul. Augustine considered the soul could be affected by the objects to which it paid attention. Miles<sup>285</sup> argues that Augustine believed that when the soul paid attention to something, such as God, for example, the soul could be influenced and changed by God, in the same way that the viewer was influenced by what they regarded with their eyes. This idea becomes particularly important when considering the question of whether or not the soul will one day enjoy the vision of God. This question is addressed by Augustine in Chapter 15 of *De Trinitate* where he says that our searching and questioning will be over as we see God face to face.

We shall see the truth there without any difficulty and shall enjoy it to the full since it is most clear and most certain. Nor shall we seek anything by the reasoning of the mind, but by contemplating we shall perceive. ... In that light there shall no longer be any inquiry. (15.25.45)<sup>286</sup>

This important question of seeing God face to face relates to the mystical vision of St Paul (2 Cor 12:2-4) in a passage which has been debated by Gregory the Great,<sup>287</sup> Gregory Nazianzen,<sup>288</sup> as well as Augustine. Such interpreters and commentators have discussed what Paul meant, and how this passage should be interpreted, and a key concern is about whether

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<sup>283</sup> The extramission theory, far from being forgotten, is still used by children and adults today. Winer's relatively recent research showed that around 50% of adults gave responses which were in accordance with a belief in extramission as an explanation of the process of visual perception. G.A. Winer et al., "Fundamentally Misunderstanding Visual Perception: Adults' Belief in Visual Emissions," *American Psychologist* 57, no. 6-7 (2002). See also D.C. Lindberg, "Science and the Early Christian Church," *Isis* 74, no. 4 (1983). For another discussion of this topic see C.G. Gross, "The Fire That Comes from the Eye," *The Neuroscientist* 5, no. 1 (1999). Such beliefs can also lead to superstitions such as the idea that someone can bestow bad luck from an evil eye.

<sup>284</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 10. Sermon 362.20 p. 257.

<sup>285</sup> Miles adds in a footnote 'The impressionability of the soul is explicitly rejected by Plotinus as incompatible with the soul's activity (Ennead 5.5.7). Despite Augustine's commitment to a description of the soul that features its activity in sensation, he does not avail himself of Plotinus' arguments. While it is possible that Augustine did not know these sections of the Enneads, it may also have been significant that he uses the Stoic account which permits him to retain the visual ray theory rejected by Plotinus in Ennead 3.6.1.' M. Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's 'De Trinitate' and 'Confessions'," *The Journal of Religion* 63, no. 2 (1983). p. 130.

<sup>286</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Trinity* (Catholic University of America Press, 1963). p. 513.

<sup>287</sup> Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "Dante and the Pauline Modes of Vision," *Harvard Theological Review* 50, no. 04 (1957). p. 277.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. pp. 275-6.

or not it is possible for a human being, during their earthly lifetime, to see God. There are related discussions about whether we shall one day be able to see God, and if so, how this relates to what we might, if we are very privileged, be able to see on earth. Paul also talks about seeing through a glass darkly (in 1 Cor 13:12) and one way to interpret these texts is to say that this earth, as God's creation, reflects the heavenly realm. The term *Speculatio* is used and Mazzeo defines this as 'seeing God through his creatures'<sup>289</sup> and goes on to explain that this is not something requiring superhuman powers, but something that anyone can do.<sup>290</sup>

Augustine may have believed that St Paul's vision of God was direct, not just 'through a glass darkly' and in this he opposed Gregory the Great,<sup>291</sup> who claimed that no-one could see God and live. Augustine argues that God can be seen in his essence, and by this term 'in his essence' (*per speciem*) Augustine means 'face to face'. Augustine, following the example of Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>292</sup> believed that Moses saw God in his essence.<sup>293</sup> This is the reason why Moses had to veil his face when he returned from the mountain, as his face was radiant with the impression that the divine vision had made on him. This kind of vision is an intellectual one, one in which the visionary has, as it were, left his earthly life behind, albeit temporarily. The person seeing, in this case Moses, has had what we might now call an 'out of body' experience. It is an example of the third kind of vision, beyond sensation or images.

Augustine also compared the vision of Paul to that of Moses. Graef<sup>294</sup> elaborates some aspects of Augustine's mystical experiences, which include the paradoxical sweetness and sadness of the vision of God. There is sweetness, because of the beauty of the divine light, but this is mixed with sadness because the experience is so fleeting. The solution to such sadness is to trust in God, rather than in one's own ability to reach that divine joy. When Augustine explains this vision in the context of Paul's vision of the third heaven, he does not dwell on the issues of what exactly the third heaven is, and whether or not there is another heaven after this one.<sup>295</sup>

Augustine considers Paul's vision of the third heaven in detail in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, where he proposed a theory that there were three types of vision of God or *visio dei*.

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<sup>289</sup> J.A. Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso* (Greenwood Press, 1968). p. 86.

<sup>290</sup> An example is when people marvel at the beauties of the natural world and claim that this leads them to believe in a divine creator.

<sup>291</sup> Mazzeo, "Dante and the Pauline Modes of Vision." p. 287.

<sup>292</sup> *ibid.* p. 279.

<sup>293</sup> Augustine's ideas on essence and substance can be found in *On the Trinity* volume 1.

<sup>294</sup> Graef, *The Light and the Rainbow*.

<sup>295</sup> St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2 (Newman Press, 1982). Chapter 12.

The first is corporal vision, that is, seeing with the eye in a physical sense a physical body. Moses seeing God in the burning bush is an example of this kind of seeing. The second is spiritual visions, where images are seen which are not actually physically present. Examples of these are images seen in dreams, such as those seen by John writing in the book of Apocalypse. The third kind is intellectual vision, whereby the mind is able to appreciate the full glory of the divinity. An example of this would be St Paul's vision on the road to Damascus. Augustine interprets these three kinds of vision as belonging to a continuum, rather than being three discrete categories.<sup>296</sup>

It is important to understand how Augustine differentiates between spiritual vision and intellectual vision. Modern usage of the words 'spiritual' and 'intellectual' is not the same as Augustine's and it is possible to misunderstand him completely if this distinction is not made clear. Augustine uses the word spiritual when he means something which is in the imagination. So spiritual visions are imaginary visions and spiritual bodies are imaginary bodies. As Nash explains, 'Spiritual vision is similar to cogitation in that it is a relating of the powers of the mind to the images of sensible things.'<sup>297</sup> Intellectual knowledge is intuitive knowledge, rather than knowledge gained from studying intellectual topics. It is 'through this vision man attains knowledge of God, the soul of man, virtues, and other universals, and this vision alone can produce sapientia.'<sup>298</sup> Augustine also explains that he does not like the word *mentale* as he thought it was 'new-fangled' but preferred the term intellectual to describe the third kind of vision.

Nash suggests that it is important to understand the dual aspect in illumination, so far as Augustine is concerned, because he thought that there was light which comes from God and light that comes from within a person.<sup>299</sup> This seems to mirror Augustine's understanding of how ordinary physical vision works. There are problems with this as it seems as if pre-existence is needed, perhaps, for such illumination to come from within the mind of man.

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<sup>296</sup> F.X. Newman, "St. Augustine's Three Visions and the Structure of the Commedia," *MLN* (1967). Augustine's theory is outlined in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 12. Newman writes: 'While he speaks of three different visions, moreover, Augustine is also at pains to emphasize that vision is essentially a continuum, in which corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual vision are related in a hierarchical system. In normal human experience, that is to say, sensation is primary, but its data are transformed into and stored as the phantasms of imagination, and these in turn are the material from which are drawn the imageless ideas of intellectual vision.' p. 59.

<sup>297</sup> R.H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (University Press of Kentucky, 1969). p. 9. It is possible that Nash is using the word 'cogitation' where modern psychology might use the word 'cognition'.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>299</sup> "Some Philosophic Sources of Augustine's Illumination Theory," *Augustin Stud* 2(1971).

This is the idea that pre-existence allows man to have knowledge of the Forms. As Nash explains, 'The memory contains not only images of past experiences but also innate ideas that correspond to the eternal forms.'<sup>300</sup> There might also be a suggestion here of what Jung called the collective unconscious.<sup>301</sup>

Augustine uses the idea that there are three types of vision to apply to both our natural, earthly sight, and our mystical sight. We can see physically an object in front of our eyes, with our bodily eyes, we can imagine an object with our imagination and we can experience an abstract idea with our intellect. In Augustine's example of the precept 'love your neighbour as yourself' he explains that we can see our actual neighbour, we can picture what our neighbour looks like in our mind's eye and we can know what love is, by thinking about the love we have for that neighbour. This is another example of the distinction between the last two types of vision as one can be called imagination whereas the other is more like intuition. Another example Augustine gives is when he uses Pharaoh's dreams, which were visions of the imagination, while Joseph had the intuition to interpret those dreams.

Graef explains how Augustine regarded the third kind of vision as superior, not because it was further away from the body, but because it somehow by-passes the imagination, which is something that could be subject to error. As Graef remarks, for Augustine 'imaginary visions are unreliable, the more so as the soul itself will often be deceived in their interpretation.'<sup>302</sup> Instead of such imaginary and therefore subjective views, Augustine gives more importance to the divinely-inspired intuition which gives a purer vision altogether. As Graef puts it,

The sublime experience of apprehending God without the veil of images has the immediate effect of making virtue far easier than it had been before, because all the different virtues are united in the one overpowering love of God who is 'seen'.<sup>303</sup>

What is interesting here is how it is the removal of the bodily aspects, even in imagination, that permits the experience to come purely from intuition, and therefore from God himself. The human imagination would, as it were, contaminate the divine inspiration. The senses fall away, they no longer feature. It is the way that the intellectual is separated from the imagination that is crucial here. Imagination is likely to err, while divinely inspired intellect (or intuition) is not. For this reason imagination is said to be inferior to intellectual vision

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>301</sup> C.G. Jung and R.F.C. Hull, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton University Press, 1981). p. 42.

<sup>302</sup> Graef, *The Light and the Rainbow*. p. 200.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid. p. 202.

because it can deceive, unlike 'the intellectual vision which is never deceived.'<sup>304</sup> This will have implications when examining, in a later section, people with limited cognitive abilities.

Another aspect of these three types of vision is their hierarchical nature. This means that when physical vision takes place, spiritual vision is also present. This, perhaps, means that our own imagination accompanies our physical vision. Perhaps one way to understand this is to think that when we look at something we are comparing it with previous examples of that type that we have seen, and these previous examples are in the form of images in our memory. This is how we recognise faces, for example. Although Augustine does not directly specify this, it is likely that intellectual vision, or intuition is also present, as we can sometimes recognise something without being sure how we do. In a similar way when spiritual vision happens, as when we picture something in our mind's eye, intellectual vision is also happening at the same time. Physical vision is not necessary, because we can picture something in our mind without actually seeing it with our physical eyes. In the same way intellectual vision can exist on its own, and does not need spiritual vision as well. One way to understand this is to consider it as a feeling, an intuition, almost an instinct, which exists without any image or object.

By using these three types of vision Augustine was able to resolve the dilemma he had about seeing God even though God is not corporeal. In Augustine's time there were some Christians who believed that God had a physical body and that one day they would be able to contemplate this. Griffin and Paulsen look at the evidence that 'fourth-century Christians did indeed believe God to be both corporeal and anthropomorphic in bodily form.'<sup>305</sup> In fact they argue that this belief was an obstacle to Augustine's conversion, because he did not believe in the corporeality of God. When he heard Ambrose preaching against it he felt that at last there was someone who shared his view. This may be one of the reasons he was so impressed by Ambrose, who was instrumental in Augustine's conversion to Catholic Christianity, and who presided over Augustine's baptism at Easter in the year 387.

Coupled with the question of whether we shall see God, is that of whether we shall see, and recognise, other people. Augustine says

There shall be peace made pure in the sons of God, all loving one another, seeing one another full of God, since God shall be all in all. We shall have God as our common

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<sup>304</sup> G. Watson, "St Augustine, the Platonists and the Resurrection Body: Augustine's Use of a Fragment from Porphyry," (1983). P 225 (This article is in the Irish Theological Quarterly, volume 50).

<sup>305</sup> Griffin and Paulsen, "Augustine and the Corporeality of God." p. 98.



object of vision, God as our common possession, God as our common peace ... Our joy, our peace, our rest, the end of all our troubles, is none but God: blessed are “they that turn their hearts unto Him.”<sup>306</sup>

Here the suggestion is that we not only see God, but we see each other, as part of the experience of seeing God. If we try to picture this in terms of images we will be using the inferior, second type of vision, spiritual vision. Instead we need to use our intellectual, or instinctive vision, one which allows us to move beyond mere images. By asking a rather curious question (in *De diversis quaestionibus*) ‘Will we ever be able to see our own thoughts?’ Augustine refers to an ethereal body in his answer.

It is usual to ask how, after the resurrection and transformation of the body which are promised to the saints, we can see our thoughts. Accordingly any conjecture must start from that part of our body which has more light, since it is necessary to believe that the bodies of angels, such as we hope to have, are completely full of light and are ethereal. If therefore many of the movements of our mind are now recognised in the eyes, it is probable that no movement of the mind will be hidden, since the entire body will be an ethereal body in comparison with which these present eyes are flesh.<sup>307</sup>

This description is full of visual imagery, but does not give a very comprehensive, or comprehensible idea of what seeing God in the intellectual sense would be like. It also leaves unanswered the question of what an ethereal body is like, and how it will be perceived. In addition, Augustine does not say whether this third kind of vision, the intellectual one, applies only to abstract things or whether it might also apply to concrete things. Another point which could be challenged is the idea that intellectual vision cannot err, since intuitions can sometimes be faulty, particularly if they are clouded by emotions, for example. Augustine does not venture to suggest whether there is another heaven above the third heaven, and whether angels intervene in spiritual vision, and what happens after death. Augustine suggests that the life we experience after death will be in the imagination, in other words, a spiritual life, and yet this seems to conflict with the idea that the resurrection of the body will take place.

An earlier section discussed Augustine’s vision of heaven as the place where ‘we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise.’<sup>308</sup> The significance of this is he includes ‘to see’ in the list of activities. He means vision in the third

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<sup>306</sup> Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*. pp. 99-100 quoting from En in Ps 84.10

<sup>307</sup> D.L. Mosher, *Eighty-Three Different Questions (the Fathers of the Church, Volume 70): A New Translation* (Catholic University of America Press, 2008). p. 82.

<sup>308</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.30 p. 1091.

sense, the intellectual sense, although this kind of vision is not impossible to achieve, even in this life, as the visionaries and mystics of the Middle Ages were able to enjoy this kind of vision during their earthly lives.<sup>309</sup>

Could it be that the visionaries and mystics of our age number among them those with cognitive impairment who see God in ways that defy verbal descriptions or intellectual understanding, using ‘intellectual’ in its modern, rather than Augustinian, sense? The obvious scriptural reference here is 1 Cor 1:27 ‘But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.’ Could it be that God has chosen people with cognitive impairment to reveal his wisdom to the world in the present time? Several of those who have observed members of L’Arche communities have commented that they seem to be very close to God. This is something to be considered in more detail in a later chapter that reviews the work of Jean Vanier and Henri Nouwen.

Augustine’s ideas influenced others who accepted his views, even when he was not specifically setting out to deliver a comprehensive theory of vision. An example of those who adapted his three part idea of vision (corporal, spiritual and intellectual) is Pope Innocent III who, in a homily, considered the way various scriptural passages indicate that one day the blessed in heaven will see God, while others indicate that this will not be possible. This homily may have been given on All Saints day, 1<sup>st</sup> November, as it was based on the text ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matt 5:8) and this text is used in the liturgy on that day. Innocent distinguished three kinds of vision as Corporeal (belonging to the senses), Enigmatic (*aenigmatica* – related to images, in the imagination) and Comprehending – related to understanding, in the intellect. Corporeal vision does not allow sight of God since God does not have a physical body. Enigmatic vision allows sight of God through faith, which is nevertheless an imperfect vision of God. Comprehending vision is the kind of vision we will one day have in heaven, when we will see God, in the sense that we will understand him. A distinction is also made between God’s essence, which it is impossible to see, and manifestations of God’s energy which can be seen. We are only able, in this present life, to see God ‘through the effect of inspiration, contemplation, prayer,

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<sup>309</sup> One such visionary is Mechthild of Magdeburg, who McGinn links to Augustine by saying that ‘Most of Mechthild’s visions fall into the traditional category of what Augustine would call spiritual, or symbolic, visions.’ B. McGinn, "The Flowering of Mysticism. Volume 3 of the Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism," (New York: Herder & Herder, 1998). p. 226. Mechthild may have been chosen by God to reveal his truth to others, because of her weakness. She was unlearned, since she did not write in Latin, but in Middle Low German, and as a woman would have been regarded as inferior to learned men.

meditation, reading, preaching – through which the soul is raised to the perception of God.’<sup>310</sup> All of these help us to see God, but the vision is still incomplete, since we will only attain the full vision in the next life. Innocent continues by saying that God is perfect wisdom, perfect beauty, and perfect peace, and in this he echoes Augustine’s description of heaven as a place of peace.<sup>311</sup>

Turner observes that the meaning of the word ‘intellect’ today is different from that in patristic and medieval times. The modern meaning, which is linked to thought and reasoning, almost of a scientific and mathematical nature, is narrower than in the time of Augustine, for example. Turner explains that the earlier meaning included the ability to ask questions which have answers that go beyond reason. He explains it as ‘reason, at the end of its tether, becomes *intellectus*, and that just where it does, it meets with God who is beyond its grasp.’<sup>312</sup> Turner also explains that this is a very confusing area of terminology and that it is therefore difficult to summarise or appreciate exactly what Augustine meant by the word intellect when he used it, and therefore what he means by intellectual vision is also not obvious. He refers to Augustine’s *Confessions* in which he discusses reason and how we make judgements.<sup>313</sup>

In explaining that reasoning is not the same thing as intellectual activity, he describes the difference thus:

‘Reasoning’ is an activity of step-by-step argument to a truth; ‘intellectual’ seeing is a form of contemplative rest in a truth, and is a higher form of knowing than any achieved by reasoning, for it is typically exercised in the knowledge of those truths on which any power of reasoning itself depends, whether theoretical or practical.<sup>314</sup>

This would imply that intellectual vision depends on the existence of reasoning, something which may be problematic when it comes to dealing with those who are, as modern vocabulary describes them, intellectually impaired. The question remains, can someone with intellectual impairment, in the present day sense, have intellectual vision, in the sense Augustine means? As Turner argues, the intellect is the place where ‘the soul meets with God

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<sup>310</sup> Translation of Innocent’s sermon in J.C. Moore, *Pope Innocent Iii (1160/61-1216): To Root up and to Plant*, vol. 47(Brill Academic Pub, 2003). p. 89.

<sup>311</sup> The title of Chapter 27 of Book 19 is, ‘The peace of God’s servants, a perfect tranquillity, not experienced in this life.’ Augustine, *City of God*. p. 892. In this chapter Augustine how the conflicts of this life will be banished by the peace of heaven.

<sup>312</sup> D. Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*(Cambridge Univ Pr, 2004). p. xv.

<sup>313</sup> *Confessions* 7.17.23

<sup>314</sup> Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*. p. 80.

in its – and in God’s – deepest intimacy.<sup>315</sup> This meeting point is a part of the soul which goes above human reason, above in the sense of to a higher place, a place beyond our ability to reason. In one of his expositions on the psalms Augustine says this

You were straining to see him and perhaps, as you stretched to the highest part of your mind, you fell back through weakness. I am guessing, from my own painful experience. But there may be someone – indeed it is more than likely that there is someone – whose fine intelligence is stronger than mine, who has fixed the contemplation of his heart for a long time on HIM WHO IS.<sup>316</sup>

The Latin words *acie mentis*, which Turner translates as the soul’s cutting edge, have been translated here as ‘the highest part of your mind’ and then further on as ‘fine intelligence’. At this cutting edge there is ‘the presence within the human mind of a source of its knowing which exceeds the human, the point in the soul where it overlaps with that which is above it.’<sup>317</sup> It is as though we are almost, but not quite, able to grasp the unknowable God, but only because God is within the human mind, inspiring the mind with the breath of his Spirit. This use of the word ‘intelligence’ has little to do with conventional ideas about intellect, however. The concept is more related to the soul than to the brain and its activities and this is particularly relevant when considering the destiny of people with cognitive impairment.

Another insight into this key distinction comes from Anna Williams who explains that the Patristics had a different understanding of the meaning of the word intellect from modern day theologians. She also says that Augustine had his own particular way of using the word that was not the same as other Patristic writers.

Augustine’s conception of the intellect is always inherently dynamic, positing a constant transfer of knowledge and wisdom from God to humanity. A particular favoured image for this transaction is illumination. Our wisdom is illumination and we become wise, not of ourselves, but as the Giver of Light illumines us.<sup>318</sup>

This supports something mentioned earlier<sup>319</sup>, when referring to recognition, as Augustine says that we will recognise others because we will be ‘full of God’, which could be another way of saying that our wisdom will come from God. Williams goes on to suggest that Augustine is perhaps thinking of the words of Psalm 36, ‘in your light we see light’, since he

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid. p. 83.

<sup>316</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*. p.195 Ps 134.6

<sup>317</sup> Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*. p. 83.

<sup>318</sup> A.N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology*(Cambridge Univ Pr, 2007). p. 148. Here she has a footnote to *On the Freedom of the Will*, 3.24.72 and *On Sin and Merit* 1.10 and 37-38.

<sup>319</sup> In Section 2.3 on the Easter Sermons.

thinks that God enables us to see, that is to receive knowledge and understanding of God. Thus, she explains, we know something is beautiful because God is beautiful and ‘the capacity for God may be said to have been imprinted upon us, a capacity that is also a likeness.’<sup>320</sup> So intellect is the way we come to know God. It is as though we have a blueprint for God within our intellect and this is why we recognise God and his works when we see them. This blueprint has no relation to our cognitive capacity for reasoning and perhaps this explains why atheists cite lack of empirical evidence for the existence of God as the reason for their unbelief. Such atheists are looking with their brains instead of their souls.

This section has considered the theme of vision in some detail because it appears in a variety of contexts in Augustine’s writing. Another area which recurs is that of memory and this will be considered in the context of people with disabilities, and in particular for those with cognitive impairment, in the following section.

#### 4. Implications for disabled people

The purpose of this section is to begin to answer the question ‘how will you know me?’ as if it had been posed to Augustine. This requirement remains, in spite of the fact that Williams claims that ‘Augustine does not entertain the speculative question of whether God could bestow wisdom on a creature lacking a mind.’<sup>321</sup> Augustine may not have considered that wisdom was necessarily the same thing as intellectual vision and he may not have felt that the mind was the most important feature of the person. For Augustine the soul may well have been even more important than the mind. Knowing is linked to memory and both are closely integrated with concepts of community and relationships. We know people because we have been in relationships with them, because they have been part of our community. We need memory to maintain our relationships, something which becomes too painfully apparent when we see the disintegration of memory in those who suffer from conditions such as Alzheimer’s.

##### 4.1 Memory

Peter Burnell claims that Augustine used the word memory in two different ways.<sup>322</sup> In one sense memory is a capacity to recall things, and this capacity is one which animals also have. In another sense, however, memory is something that involves reason, and animals do not

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<sup>320</sup> Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology*. p. 150.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid. p. 149.

<sup>322</sup> P. Burnell, *The Augustinian Person*(Catholic Univ of Amer Pr, 2005).

have this capacity. According to Burnell Augustine describes the former, animal kind of memory in *City of God*, but the latter, reasoning kind, in *De Trinitate*. He also explains Augustine's ideas on human awareness which has three components; sense, judgement and knowledge.

To know someone if we saw them in heaven would require us to have a memory of that person as we know them on earth. Writing in Book 10 of the *Confessions*, Augustine describes

the immense court of my memory; for there sky and earth and sea are readily available to me, together with everything that I have ever been able to perceive in them, apart from what I have forgotten. And there I come to meet myself.<sup>323</sup> I recall myself, what I did, when and where I acted in a certain way, and how I felt about so acting.<sup>324</sup>

When commenting on the *Confessions*, Ratzinger makes the point that for Augustine it is memory that allows us to synthesise different periods of time. This is how Ratzinger explains it:

In memory, he [i.e. Augustine] finds past, present and future gathered into one in a peculiar way which, on the one hand, offers some idea of what God's eternity might be like, and, on the other, indicates the special manner in which man both is bound to time and transcends time. In these reflections, Augustine comes to realise that memory alone brings about that curious reality we call the "present."<sup>325</sup>

What Ratzinger seems to be saying here is that memory enables us to bring past, present and future together, allowing us to escape from the bounds of time. Since God is not bound by time, we can get a glimpse of what eternity (being outside of time) might be like, by considering this feature of memory.

O'Collins asserts 'our personal identity is somehow bound up with bodily continuity. To be the same person we must be the same body. But in what sense must we or can we rise with the *same* body?'<sup>326</sup> The difficulty here is that our bodies constantly change so someone who knew us as a child, and then met us as an old person would not recognise us. He then goes on to say that we should not be in too much of a hurry to discard Augustine's insistence on the same body, just because our biological knowledge tells us that our bodies are constantly

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<sup>323</sup> In the footnote, Boulding, the translator, comments that this means that memory is a place of self-awareness.

<sup>324</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 1. 10, 14. p. 246.

<sup>325</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*(Catholic Univ of Amer Pr, 2007). p. 182.

<sup>326</sup> Gerald O'Collins in F. LeMoine and C. Kleinhenz, *Saint Augustine the Bishop: A Book of Essays*(Garland Pub., 1994). p. 72.

changing with the growth and renewal of cells, and so on. 'Through our bodiliness we freely create and develop a whole web of relationships with other people, the world, and God. Our history comes from our body being in relationship.'<sup>327</sup> Given that our history is affected by our relationships, so relationships affect our identity, something Marrou explains thus:

the perdurance of the entire fabric, woven throughout the whole of our life by the complex of relationships established between our deepest self and God, between ourselves and our human brethren, and finally, between us and the world where we have acted, reacted, struggled, suffered, and created.<sup>328</sup>

This conveys the idea that human identity is formed from a network of relationships and experiences and that these interactions create our history of which God is an integral part. Thus, in order to understand human identity, we turn next to Augustine's experiences of community and relationships.

#### 4.2 Community and Relationships

Augustine's spirituality is firmly rooted in the community in which he served. He is a Bishop of a flock to whom he preaches, sometimes at great length, encouraging them to join him in his spiritual journeys. He tells his brothers and sisters that there are many things which he, like them, does not understand about the kingdom of heaven, 'seeing that I too, brothers and sisters, am walking together with you by faith, not yet by sight.'<sup>329</sup>

For Augustine the way to close union with God must be through the church, which he calls the tabernacle.<sup>330</sup> In this way he makes it clear that an individual cannot merely contemplate God alone, but must, instead, be rooted in the Christian community. It is easy to forget, when we picture the revered bishop writing in his chamber, that, as a bishop, he lived in a community of brothers. This need for community can be a useful link to Vanier who has written extensively about community.

Although some have argued that Augustine's idea of heaven does not include social relations,<sup>331</sup> Augustine himself does give glimpses of people who enjoy each other's

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<sup>327</sup> O'Collins in *ibid.* p. 72.

<sup>328</sup> Marrou, "The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values." p. 29.

<sup>329</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 10. Sermon 362.4 p. 243.

<sup>330</sup> *Expositions of the Psalms 33-50*, ed. J.E. Rotelle, trans. O.S.B. Maria Boulding (New City Press, 2003). P 246 on Ps 41.9 In this translation she refers to the tabernacle as a tent, saying that Augustine uses the term tent, rather than home, for the place where the Church dwells, because a tent is something temporary, while our home is where we will be in heaven, a permanent place to dwell. See also his exposition of Psalm 26.6.

<sup>331</sup> 'No food, sex, or social relations in the Kingdom. His saved individuals, in their perfected bodies - spiritually oriented, physically flawless, thirty-something - stand in comradely contemplation of the beatific vision of God.' Fredriksen, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity. From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo." p. 166.

presence. He says ‘for this peace is the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God.’<sup>332</sup> The inclusion of ‘*and of each other*’ is important to note here. Furthermore he writes, ‘since the life of the city is inevitably a social life,’<sup>333</sup> which argues that he did expect the heavenly city to involve relationships.

It is clear that community life was important to Augustine, both from descriptions of his early life and from the fact that even as a Bishop he lived in a community of religious.<sup>334</sup> Heaven for him could not be a place where the soul communed only with God. His wistful imaginings of his friend Nebridius are not the only indication that he viewed heaven as a social place. Marrou has a similar idea when he writes that

Nothing could be more foreign to the Augustinian concept than to imagine each soul bound, so to say, exclusively, by direct line to God, and leaving others out of account. We must not forget that we are and shall remain members one of another, forming the same body, that of Christ in his plenitude.<sup>335</sup>

It can be inferred from Brown’s description that Augustine identified himself with his congregation and looked forward to a ‘future life, all together, in ‘that sweet City’.’<sup>336</sup>

Augustine’s observations in the *Enchiridion*<sup>337</sup> suggest that he had an idea of fairness, which recognises that different people will deserve a different kind of treatment in the next life. Perhaps those who have suffered much in this life, because of their disabilities, or for other reasons, will not endure so many afflictions in the next life, but will, instead, enjoy Sabbath rest in the bosom of Abraham.<sup>338</sup>

Could it be that in some way Augustine would expect that those who have suffered much in this life will be rewarded for their sufferings in the next? Even an unpromising area like the mechanistic approach found in *City of God* Book 22 might be of relevance to those with

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<sup>332</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 19.17 p. 878.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. 19.17 p. 879.

<sup>334</sup> P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1969). Chapter 6, entitled ‘Friends’ describes the importance of friends to Augustine.

<sup>335</sup> Marrou, "The Resurrection and Saint Augustine's Theology of Human Values." p. 33. The phrase ‘forming the same body’ links to Augustine’s *Totus Christus* idea which has been mentioned elsewhere.

<sup>336</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. p. 251.

<sup>337</sup> Chapter 109 of the *Enchiridion* is entitled *The State of the Soul During the Interval Between Death and the Resurrection*.

<sup>338</sup> This idea is echoed in Mechthild of Magdeburg as well, when she argues that on the day of Judgement, God will weigh each soul’s suffering against the sufferings of Christ. ‘Thus a just balance is secured: those who have most in the scales (to weigh against Christ’s suffering) will have most cause for joy.’ M. Magdeburgensis and L. Menzies, *The Revelations of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1297) or the Flowing Light of the Godhead* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1953). Part 5, 3. p. 128.



disabilities. In some of these areas Augustine seems to be answering the question, ‘when I get to heaven, will I be cured?’ The statue analogy, for example, is relevant to those who are concerned about the fate of those whose bodies are deformed in some way. Augustine reassures them that ‘anything in that nature that is deformed [...] will be restored in such a way as to remove the deformity while preserving the substance intact.’<sup>339</sup> When he says that the substance remains intact this could be understood to mean that the essential part of that person, their identity, remains intact.<sup>340</sup> Thus the person will still be recognisable as who they were in their earthly life, even though their deformity, whatever it might be, has been removed.<sup>341</sup>

There is a section of the *Enchiridion* where Augustine seems to be talking specifically about conjoined twins and how they will be dealt with in the resurrection. He says that

Thus each individual soul will possess its own individual body: even those that were born adhering together will no longer adhere, but each individual will be separately equipped with those limbs of his own of which the undefective human body is constructed.<sup>342</sup>

*ita ut singulae animae singula sua corpora obtineant, nullis cohaerentibus etiam quaecumque cohaerentia nata fuerant, sed seorsum sibi singulis sua membra gestantibus quibus humani corporis impletur integritas.*

The word ‘defective’ in the English translation has no exact equivalent in the Latin. Augustine uses the two words ‘*impletur integritas*’ where *impletur* is the verb meaning ‘it will be filled’ and *integritas* means ‘integrity’. This conveys a sense of wholeness, something which is complete and as it should be, as God intended. Integrity also conveys a sense of something which is true and honest. For Augustine this is a positive word, not the opposite of the negative ‘defective’.

In the case of conjoined twins it is not difficult to imagine how they could appear once restored to normality. Cases where the deformity is less clearly defined, particularly in the case of cognitive deficiencies, are less straightforward. Whilst the undefective human body is

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<sup>339</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.19 p. 1060.

<sup>340</sup> In Latin the above is ‘*quod deforme natum fuerat [...] sic esse rediturum, ut servata integritate substantiae deformitas pereat.*’ So Augustine has used the word ‘*substantia*’ rather than ‘*essentia*’ which is usually translated as essence. A full discussion of the difference between substance and essence is beyond the scope of this work. See Augustine’s definition of the Trinity as one essence with three substances, in Book 5 of *The Trinity*. Essence is something that can only exist in the singular, an example being greatness. See Book 5.11.

<sup>341</sup> The basic idea of restoration seems simple enough. The difficulty comes when the deformity, or defect, has become part of who that person is. The example of Stephen Hawking’s voice has already been mentioned in the Introduction.

<sup>342</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion or Manual to Laurentius*. Ch. 87.

not difficult to envisage, the undefective mind is harder to define. For the physical body ‘undefective’ means it possesses the correct number of limbs and organs. For the mind, however, no clear measure of normality can be found. The very fact that each human mind is different, that there is such diversity, is what makes human beings creative and imaginative. ‘Life to the full’ which Jesus promises in John 10:10 is not something restricted only to those with the brains of Einstein. Furthermore, identity and personality, those features which make each person unique, cannot be confined to any definition of what might be supposed to be normal.

The question of identity is important because bereaved people in Augustine’s time are no different from bereaved people today. Their questions are about where their loved one has gone, will they see them again, and will they know them. For pagan Philosophers<sup>343</sup>, those who were convinced that the soul survived death in the absence of the body, identity was less of an issue. The flesh was their problem, and once they had passed beyond the bounds of this life they would be released from the imprisonment of the body. Augustine has to convince the non-believers of his world that the body would survive after death, that the body was not to be cast aside, and that it would be transformed, after the last judgement, by resurrection, into an immortal, spiritual body, but a body nonetheless. The question Augustine’s congregation were eager to have answered was, what sort of body? The next section looks at how Augustine answers some of the questions raised by the idea of bodily resurrection.

Since separation from bodily things seems to be a requirement for this kind of vision, perhaps those who are intellectually and physically impaired may find it easier to disengage from the body. As Mazzeo writes of Paul’s vision:

There he saw those things which are entirely above corporeal nature. There he had a pure vision of intelligible things. This was the “third heaven” which he reached through a total alienation from the corporeal senses and from corporeal things. There he saw the intelligible universe as the angels and the blessed see it, and, even more, he saw God in his essence.<sup>344</sup>

When considering people with learning difficulties, questions arise about what they imagine when they think about love, or any other abstract thing. Does their intellectual impairment mean they cannot imagine abstract things? It seems more likely that they can, since it may

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<sup>343</sup> The term Platonists is usually used to describe Augustine’s opponents and I include Celsus, Plotinus and Porphyry here under this heading. At one time Augustine would have describe himself as a Platonist, and some of his early ideas show traces of influence from Platonic thought and ideas.

<sup>344</sup> Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso*. pp. 94-5.

not be necessary to be able to imagine love in order to be able to feel it. Since they are able to feel love, to appreciate it and to enjoy it, they must be able to imagine it. They can intuitively know when someone behaves in a loving way towards them, or, conversely, when someone is hostile towards them. Jean Vanier tells a story about a Bishop at the Synod on the Laity in Rome in 1987 who agrees to hold in his arms a boy called Armando who has a severe learning disability.<sup>345</sup> The description of the Bishop holding the child, of the thrill that goes through that small body as it is held in a loving way and the delight of the bishop all give testimony to the power of disabled people to give and receive love. We may not have witnessed such a scene yet we can feel, intuitively, what this loving exchange between the Bishop and the child was like.

The question which arises at this point is, can those with cognitive impairments experience the third kind of vision, even if their ability to articulate it is deficient? To what extent is Augustine's intellectual vision dependent upon a degree of cognitive competence? Augustine would not require verbal fluency, for example, since he sometimes admits that he does not have the ability to describe some spiritual experiences.<sup>346</sup> It is not important if people lack the vocabulary to describe their vision. Intuition defies description, even for those who are most fluent with words. Imagination requires higher cognitive skills, and yet Augustine appears to want to suppress imagination, because of its tendency to error, or to personal influences.

Augustine's insistence on absence of corruption does not make clear what the resurrected body will actually be like once the part capable of decay has gone. Will the 'disabled' part of someone's body go, along with the corruptible part? And if it does, will they still be recognisable? The underlying question here seems to be, will the bodies we possess in eternity be the same ones we have now, or different ones? Augustine says 'at the resurrection the saints will inhabit the actual bodies in which they suffered the hardships of this life on earth'.<sup>347</sup> Some ideas can be found from the way Augustine talks about the martyrs and their scars, and from links to the body of the resurrected Jesus.

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<sup>345</sup> J. Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (Paulist Pr, 1992). pp. 27-28. Vanier reports 'I could see that Armando in all his littleness, but with all the power of love in his heart, was touching and changing the heart of that bishop. [...] Armando can awaken us to love and call forth the well of living waters and of tenderness hidden inside of us... That is the power of Armando.'

<sup>346</sup> An example is from Sermon 362.4 where he is describing the country we are striving to reach, in other words, heaven. 'That secret place, which *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it come up into the heart of man* (1 Cor 2:9) – what eloquence can be adequate for me to unfold it to you, or what eyes will enable us to see it?' Augustine, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 10. p. 243.

<sup>347</sup> *City of God*. 13.19 p. 532.

Augustine insists that no defects will be found in resurrected bodies, even though the resurrected Jesus manifested his scars, Augustine explains that these were marks of power, rather than defects. It was through these scars that the doubts of Thomas were removed. As Augustine puts it ‘The scars of the wounds in His flesh healed the wound of unbelief.’<sup>348</sup> Similar ideas relating to scars can be found in what he says about the martyrs. Because of their martyrdom they are allowed immediate access to blessedness, but the marks of their earthly sufferings are permitted to remain, rather like Christ’s wounds were visible after his resurrection. Speaking of this he argues that ‘For in those wounds there will be no deformity, but only dignity, and the beauty of their valour will shine out, a beauty *in* the body and yet not *of* the body.’<sup>349</sup> This might be a way in which those who have disabilities could be accommodated in Augustine’s heaven by considering their deformities as marks of honour, although even he at times admits that there are many things that we do not and cannot know about life in heaven. He also seems to be playing around with the labels at this point. A scar renamed as a mark of virtue is still a scar,<sup>350</sup> and yet the cross being glorious is not just a re-naming, but a transformation. Further aspects of this issue will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Finally the *Enchiridion* has some specific references to the kind of bodies Augustine expects in the resurrection.

Therefore the bodies of the saints will rise again free from defect, free from deformity, free from any corruption or burden or difficulty. In them facility will be matched with felicity: which is why they are described as spiritual, though without controversy they will be bodies, and not spirits. But at this present it is described as an animate body, while yet it is a body and not a soul, so at that time it will be a spiritual body, while remaining a body, not a spirit.<sup>351</sup>

*Resurgente igitur sanctorum corpora sine ullo vitio, sine ulla deformitate, sine ulla corruptione, onere, difficultate, in quibus tanta facilitas quanta felicitas erit. Propter quod et spiritalia dicta sunt, cum procul dubio corpora sint futura, non spiritus. Sed sicut nunc corpus animale dicitur, quod tamen corpus non anima est, ita tunc spiritale corpus erit, corpus tamen non spiritus erit.*<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Sermon 242

<sup>349</sup> *City of God*. 22.19 p. 1062.

<sup>350</sup> In *Faith and the Creed* 6,13 he says, ‘By a ‘spiritual body’ we mean one so docile to the spirit that it is fit for a heavenly abode, seeing that its every weakness and all its earthly blemishes have been changed and transformed into a steadfastness and purity of a heavenly kind.’ *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*. p. 329. This suggests that the nature of the heavenly bodies we shall have in the eschaton is such that our bodily infirmities and difficulties will no longer be an issue for us.

<sup>351</sup> *Enchiridion or Manual to Laurentius*. Ch. 91.

<sup>352</sup> ‘Sed sicut nunc corpus animale dicitur’ refers to 1 Cor 15, 44-46.

There is no distortion in the translation here. Augustine is quite clear that the resurrected body will be a spiritual body, not a spirit. Perhaps it would be clearer to say the body will be not *just* a spirit, any more than it is *just* a soul now, consisting of body and soul.

Still questions remain, however. What does this mean for the child with Down's Syndrome. Words like 'defect' and 'deformity' and 'corruption' and 'burden' and 'difficulty' can be context-dependent. A chromosome abnormality is a defect, it is a deformity. So does that deformity cease to exist in the eschaton? If the chromosome deformity is removed, how does this change that person's identity? 'How will you know me?' has still to be answered.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to unravel some of the varied strands of Augustine's eschatology. He deals with the subject of the world to come in a variety of ways. These include letters to the bereaved, sermons preached to the newly-baptised, personal reflections in his *Confessions* and detailed analysis in the *City of God*. Skilled rhetorician that he was, his language and style varied according to the needs of his intended audience. Eventually, for Augustine, it all comes down to love, as he says in Exposition on Psalm 149,

All of us who sigh in this life and long for that homeland must run toward it, not by swift feet but by love. Such travellers look not for ships but for wings; let them seize the twin wings of charity. What are charity's paired wings? Love of God and love of our neighbour.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*. Psalm 149, 5. p. 496.

## Chapter 3 Anticipating eschatological healing: the theology of L'Arche

*People with learning disabilities are leading me more fully into an understanding of the gospel message and of the life of Jesus. [...] So many of us intellectualise this message of Jesus and remain inside our own heads. People with disabilities have helped me to realise that it is a message of the heart, a message of love and of humility adapted to those who cry out, "Do you love me?" and who are open to a personal relationship with God. This cry for relationship from people who are weak and vulnerable has helped me to live closer to Jesus, the Word who became flesh, vulnerable and little, the one who begs each one of us to receive him into our hearts so that we may receive others into our hearts.*<sup>354</sup>

### Introduction

The first two chapters have identified themes from disability discourse and from Augustine. This chapter builds on practices of communal life and its theological background as realised in the L'Arche communities which Jean Vanier founded in 1964 when he invited Raphael and Philippe, two mentally handicapped men (as they were described in those days), to live with him in a house in a small village in France. Vanier has written nearly thirty books since that time and others have also written accounts of their experiences living and working in L'Arche. This chapter considers some key themes under five headings, Identity, Relationships, Vulnerability, Transformation, Death and Resurrection.

The first section, on identity, looks at what Vanier believes it means to be a human person, in other words, how identity is defined and shaped. Identity is considered under the three headings of worth, vocation, and void. In order to deal with these aspects people need the support of belonging to a community, and this idea is taken up in the following section on relationships. This section is considered by looking at a series of paradoxical ideas. The first of these is that although humans have a void within them they also contain treasure. The second paradox is that expressed by the phrase of Paul that 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (2Cor 12:10). From this paradox comes the idea that sacrifice brings rewards. The third paradox is concerned with the tensions that exist between individuality and freedom pitched against the needs of the community. The challenges of community life are relevant here. The third section of this chapter looks at vulnerability by considering three ideas,

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<sup>354</sup> J Vanier, "What Have People with Learning Disabilities Taught Me?," in *The Paradox of Disability: Responses to Jean Vanier and L'Arche Communities from Theology and the Sciences*, ed. H.S. Reinders(Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010). p. 24.

suffering, daring and hoping. The fourth section looks at the transformative effect of suffering, in a way that could also be called a transfiguration. Themes here are those of how suffering can be hidden, but can lead to revelation and this is what leads to transformation. The final section draws on the contribution of Henri Nouwen and in particular considers his interpretation of realised eschatology, a theme which was previously discussed in Chapter 2.

Jean Vanier first came across the works of Aristotle when he left the navy and began to study philosophy and theology. Examples of Aristotle's influence on Vanier's thinking can be found primarily in *Made for Happiness*, a book which is subtitled *Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*. In the Introduction to this book Vanier observes that 'Aristotle's ethics are not [...] based on an idea but on the desire for fullness of life inscribed in every human being.'<sup>355</sup> In the conclusion to this book Vanier offers a critique of Aristotelian ethics.

'Aristotle could not conceive of the fact that weak people might be able to help a man to become more human, to grow in his humanity.'<sup>356</sup> Then, with typical Vanier gentleness, while not excusing Aristotle for his narrowness of vision, he does not condemn him either. He explains how transformation comes from accepting our own limitations, a process which is helped by observing how people with disabilities accept their own limitations. Thus, 'we become more human, more welcoming, and more open to others.'<sup>357</sup> In this way resurrection comes after the darkness, after the despair which disability, or other types of suffering, can bring.

Vanier's doctoral thesis, which was entitled "Happiness as Principle and End of Aristotelian Ethics", was submitted in 1962. He comments that researching Aristotle 'brought me a great deal of light and helped me to grasp the connection between ethics, psychology, and spirituality.'<sup>358</sup> Michael Downey points out that 'Paragraphs of his dissertation wherein he summarizes the importance of friendship, justice, and contemplation read like he is describing the community of L'Arche.'<sup>359</sup> It could be argued that these key ideas of

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<sup>355</sup> J. Vanier and K. Spink, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle* (House of Anansi Pr, 2005). p. xi. As Aristotle argues, 'happiness is a principle; for [the principle] is what we all aim at in all our other actions; and we take the principle and cause of goods to be something honourable and divine.' Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999). 1102a 3-4, p. 16.

<sup>356</sup> Vanier and Spink, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*. p. 187.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. p. 188.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid. p. xiii.

<sup>359</sup> M. Downey, *A Blessed Weakness: The Spirit of Jean Vanier and L'Arche* (Harper & Row, 1986). pp. 44-45. An example from Aristotle is when he speaks of friendship and living in community. 'For friendship is community, and we are related to our friend as we are related to ourselves. Hence, since the perception of our own being is choiceworthy, so is the perception of our friend's being. Perception is active when we live with him; hence, not surprisingly, this is what we seek.' Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1171b 33-34, p. 153.

friendship, justice and contemplation are also key to understanding the vocation or mission of each person, no matter what their physical or cognitive limitations might be. This idea of mission, or vocation, comes through in various guises when Vanier speaks of the work and purpose of L'Arche.

## 1. Personal Identity: personhood and what it means to be a human person

The aim of this section is to look at how Vanier tries to define the human person, which he does in three thematic ways. The first theme is the worth, or value, of every human being. Secondly comes the idea that everyone has a mission or what might also be called a vocation. The third theme is that of the void, recognising that human beings have an emptiness within which can be compared to the tomb of Lazarus<sup>360</sup>.

### 1.1 Human beings have worth

The value of each human life would seem to be an obvious concept, one which is tied up with the idea of human dignity. For Vanier each human being has worth which is not in proportion to the gifts, talents or status of the person, but is something possessed by virtue of being human, being sons and daughters of God. His strong sense of the importance of each individual life is something that comes out time and again in his writing. The value of each person, even when that value is hidden behind some disability or handicap, or behind some other form of disguise, underlies the ethos of L'Arche. 'There is a meaning to every life, even if we cannot see it. I believe that each person, in her unique beauty and worth, lives out a sacred story.'<sup>361</sup> Here, by using the term 'sacred story', Vanier demonstrates how his ideas and beliefs are underpinned by a strong sense of God at the heart of personhood. This leads him to assert that not only are human lives of worth, but that they have a purpose, which is part of God's purpose for humanity. A key passage is the following:

Jesus came to reveal to each one of us who we are, with all that is in us. It is the revelation of our deepest identity. He came to reveal that we are precious and important, and that each of us is called not to be frightened, but to grow in love and truth. He came to reveal that we are to take our place in the world as messengers of peace.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Vanier asks, 'Aren't we all Lazarus? Are there not parts in each one of us that are dead, caught up in a culture of death?' Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 203.

<sup>361</sup> *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences* (Ottawa, Ont. and Maryknoll, NY: Novalis, 1997). p. 147.

<sup>362</sup> *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 157.



This passage contains several related ideas. The worth of each individual is underlined, as already mentioned. There is then a reminder that humans are called to grow. The calling, or vocation, of each person is to be ‘messengers of peace’. The fact that someone has a disability does not mean they do not have a vocation. On the contrary, their vocation is clear because ‘Each one has a mission. Each of us is born so that God’s work may be accomplished in us.’<sup>363</sup> Vanier makes this assertion in his commentary on the Gospel of John 9, where Jesus is asked whose fault it is that a man was born blind.<sup>364</sup> Vanier believes that disabled people have just as much worth, or perhaps even more worth, than non-disabled people. He feels it is particularly important to recognise the worth of those who might otherwise be overlooked, including people with disabilities, those who are on the margins of society. Sometimes their worth is hidden, but it is still there.

Those who have spent time working in, and observing, L’Arche communities have also commented on this idea of the intrinsic worth of each member of the community. One assistant<sup>365</sup> in the USA L’Arche communities<sup>366</sup> describes how Henri Nouwen<sup>367</sup> particularly impressed her with his message that we are all beloved sons and daughters of God and she confirmed that this was an authentic part of her life as an assistant.<sup>368</sup> John Sumarah, who conducted an ethnographic study of a L’Arche community in Canada, describes how a meeting with Bill, who is lying motionless in bed, powerfully illustrates how one person can

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid. p. 172.

<sup>364</sup> ‘As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.’ (John 9: 1-3) Augustine discusses this Gospel in Tractate 44 where he explains that the blind man represents the whole human race. Original sin was the cause of everyone being blind from birth, where blindness is equated with unbelief. The washing in the pool represents baptism, which brings enlightenment, or sight, to the unbeliever. Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John Volume 2*, ed. B. Ramsey, trans. E. Hill, vol. 13, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (New York: New City Press, 2009).

<sup>365</sup> Although the term ‘core member’ is not always used today, in the earlier years of L’Arche this term was used for people with disabilities who live in a L’Arche community, while assistants are those who work there and help them.

<sup>366</sup> K.S. Reimer, *Living L’Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009). Reimer conducted an ethnographic study involving participant observation in several L’Arche communities in the USA.

<sup>367</sup> The assistant had heard Nouwen give a talk to a church gathering in California, and a recording of this talk can be found at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3701709082567809182> with a transcript of the talk in H.J.M. Nouwen and R.A. Jonas, *Beauty of the Beloved: A Henri J.M. Nouwen Anthology* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999). pp. 96-100.

<sup>368</sup> ‘There’s a lot that gets in the way. But in L’Arche we have a chance to find out what it means. We are finding out about God’s love in the most profound ways and through the biggest hurts. We are learning about what this means and how to do it with each other. Our core members show us every day. We show each other. Most of all, God shows us – and challenges us to believe it.’ Paula’s story in Reimer, *Living L’Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. P 49.

influence another, in a profound way, without having to say or do anything.<sup>369</sup> Similar evidence comes from Henri Nouwen's experience working with a man called Adam, something which is further discussed in section 5 of this chapter.

## 1.2 Human beings have a vocation

After he had relinquished his two previous careers, firstly as a naval officer and secondly as a teacher of philosophy, Vanier discovered his true vocation, working with people with disabilities. This calling was not immediately obvious to him at first, but he links finding one's vocation to finding one's identity. 'Human life is a journey home, a journey towards becoming what we really are, towards finding our deepest identity and gradually opening ourselves to others.'<sup>370</sup> The eschatological aspect of this relates to the journey of life ending in the heavenly home, but more than just a location, this is also the place where humans discover their true identity.

It was through being open to others, in the first instance to Raphael and Philippe, who he invited to share his home, that Vanier discovered his vocation, as can be seen from the next extract, another key passage.

Each person has his secret and mystery, his particular journey, his vocation to grow. Certainly, many people never achieve full maturity, but each can make a little progress towards establishing his identity and becoming open to others. The important thing is not that we should achieve human perfection – far from it – but that we should set out on the road towards it through acts of openness and love, kindness and communion. Every person today, in whatever situation he finds himself, in his home or at work, can perform such acts.<sup>371</sup>

This contains several ideas. First the phrase 'vocation to grow' indicating something ongoing, something developmental, in the human calling. Secondly there is the idea that such a vocation is not only for the intellectuals, or the professionals, but for everyone. Thirdly there is the concept of acts of kindness being part of what it is to be human. A similar idea can be found when he says that 'Your life and mine have a meaning in the heart of Jesus and, by the

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<sup>369</sup> 'His face is radiant and reminds me of what it must be like to be purified. His eyes are beautiful – clear and pure. I sit beside him. I'm not sure what to say; whether to say anything at all. I mutter, 'How are you today, Bill?' just to hear myself speak. There is no verbal reply. I just sit beside him and we're quiet together. I wonder how involved the community is with him. I reflect on how busy we all are; Bill is not busy. For a moment I feel I have a sense of that which is essential in life. Bill offers me that fleeting moment. How much one could learn from him. As I leave Bill I take his hand; I feel I'm in the presence of someone special and I want to be touched by him.' J. Sumarah, *The Therapy of L'Arche: A Model of Shared Living*(1985). pp. 78-79.

<sup>370</sup> Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences*. p. 133.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid. p. 148.

power of the Holy Spirit, we can bring life to the world through little acts of love and faithful relationships.<sup>372</sup>

Vanier explains this more fully here, how this idea of bringing life to the world is realised:

The glory of human beings is to communicate life, pouring the oils of compassion on suffering people. It is with Jesus and in him to transform others, to help them move from inner death, sadness and aggression to inner peace, joy and fullness of life.<sup>373</sup>

Here Vanier indicates that the purpose of that vocation to be compassionate is more than simply making the world a better place. Compassion brings life in its fullness and brings transformation, a theme which will be explored further in the penultimate section of this chapter.

Another feature of vocation is the idea that an individual has responsibility towards global as well as personal relations. Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognised that this extends our vocation beyond the immediate work that we do into a recognition of our duty towards wider society. As Bonhoeffer explains, 'Vocation is responsibility, and responsibility is the whole response of the whole person to reality as a whole.'<sup>374</sup> As Bernd Wannenwetsch observes, this means that 'Bonhoeffer understood the summons to speak up and act for the most vulnerable not only as the responsibility of the individual Christian, but as the communal vocation of the church which is called to be "Church for others."<sup>375</sup> Thus care for people with disabilities is a mandate for the church as a whole not just for those individuals who find themselves in care-giving occupations.

Furthermore, when Bonhoeffer emphasises 'the whole' (he uses the term three times) it implies that in the eschaton we will be whole, rather than fragmented or incomplete, as we are on earth. The whole person is not always visible to others. The whole person is a mystery, hidden behind a disguise, because we are afraid to reveal who we really are. The whole person was the person who Jesus saw, when he was talking to the Samaritan woman at the well or when he met Mary Magdalene in the garden after the resurrection.<sup>376</sup> Vanier discusses this scene, pointing out that while Mary was frantically searching for him, it is

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<sup>372</sup> *The Broken Body* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988). p. 75.

<sup>373</sup> *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 271.

<sup>374</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton (SCM Press, 1955). p. 293.

<sup>375</sup> Bernd Wannenwetsch, "'My Strength Is Made Perfect in Weakness': Bonhoeffer and the War over Disabled Life," in *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*, ed. B. Brock and J. Swinton (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012). p. 367.

<sup>376</sup> John 4: 4-26, John 20:16.

Jesus who finds her, and she is able to recognise him when he calls her by name. He adds that ‘So, too, each of us is waiting to be found and called by our name.’<sup>377</sup> Perhaps it is significant that when Mary recognises Jesus, who has called her by name, they are close to the tomb. The tomb can be representative of a void that is within each person. When Jesus calls Mary by name he is aware of the void within her, the emptiness because she is searching for the one she has lost. The next section explores this idea of the void, or tomb, within human beings. When Jesus calls Lazarus forth from his tomb, he is calling us all out into the light of recognition.

### 1.3 Human beings have a void within them

We are all faced with death and this realisation leads to our shadow side, the darkness that is within every person. We are in need of the healing, resurrection experience of Lazarus, as God calls us to come out of our tombs. Vanier outlines the story of

Lazarus, who was sickly (*asthenés*). In the language of today, we would probably say “who was disabled.” The Greek word *asthenés* can be translated as “sick,” “without strength,” “feeble” or “insignificant.”<sup>378</sup>

It is Vanier’s belief that Lazarus may have had an intellectual impairment, something we now call a learning disability, since it would be strange for a man of his age in Jewish society at that time to be unmarried and living with his sisters. One explanation for this may have been that Lazarus had a serious disability, something that the word *asthenés* could imply. Although Vanier comments that this is simply his own supposition and that it is not central to the story, there is an implication that the raising of this particular man from the dead is somehow more significant than if he had raised any other typical person from the dead. Lazarus could be a representative of all disabled people, chosen by God for a special vocation, to be the central character in the miracle which was subsequently to lead to Jesus’ own death.

When Jesus meets the grieving Mary the Greek words used to describe what Jesus does are *embrimáomai* and *tarássō*, which Vanier says are difficult to translate. ‘*Embrimáomai* is a word filled with emotion; it can mean “groaning” and can even be used for a horse snorting! *Tarássō* can mean agitated, anguished, troubled.’<sup>379</sup> These words emphasise the deep emotion felt by Jesus, realising perhaps that by responding to the grief of Mary and raising Lazarus he will anger the Jewish authorities and this will lead to his death.

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<sup>377</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 339.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid. p. 195.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid. p. 199.

Having discussed the meaning of the Greek words, an aspect which relates to the historical interpretation of the story, Vanier follows this with the symbolic aspects when he asks, ‘Are there not parts in each one of us that are dead, caught up in a culture of death?’<sup>380</sup> He indicates here that we all have a void, an emptiness, within us, parts of our psyche which we choose to ignore, or repress, because they are dark and destructive. It is our common humanity that he speaks of when he observes that ‘the story of Lazarus is the story of each one of us. It is the revelation that Jesus came to call us to rise up and to become fully alive in order to give life.’<sup>381</sup> Out of death comes life, and so from the void humans can bring forth treasure.

Having reflected on the words of Augustine, that ‘our heart is restless until it rests in you’<sup>382</sup>, Vanier explains that we all have a void in our hearts, even those who come from very loving and supportive families.

‘The wounded heart of every child, with its fears and selfishness, comes from an awareness – more or less conscious – of this emptiness deep within our being which we desperately try to fill, but which we find nothing can totally satisfy. This void is a source of inner anguish but, if the child has even a minimum of confidence, this anguish can become a driving force towards a search for commitment to others and truth.’<sup>383</sup>

Here he touches on our identity, and how emptiness, or a void, can lead to something positive. Ideas which develop this idea of the void which contains treasure will be explored later in the next section.

The weakness, the void, is not confined to those with disabilities because it is common to all of humanity. Even those who go to L’Arche as helpers can find themselves surprised to discover their own weakness. Michael Downey visited L’Arche in 1986, with the intention of helping others, and found that some of his assumptions about power and weakness were quickly overturned there.<sup>384</sup> Of the three ideas of this section, two are what we might consider positive attributes of the person - worth and vocation - whilst the third, the void, is at first

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid. p. 203.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid. p. 204.

<sup>382</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 2008). Book 1.i. p. 3.

<sup>383</sup> J. Vanier, *Man and Woman, God Made Them* (Paulist Pr, 2008). pp. 13-14.

<sup>384</sup> ‘I became acutely aware of my own vulnerability, something I was not so very aware of in the academic world. None of the ready devices I had previously relied upon worked for me. In the experience of such vulnerability and limitation I began to realise that the seeds of the divine and the capacities of the human heart are found in weakness, not in strength.’ Downey, *A Blessed Weakness: The Spirit of Jean Vanier and L’Arche*. p. 5.

glance a negative aspect. This will be further considered in the following section, in order to draw out how that negative aspect can bear fruit when God reveals himself through weakness.

## 2. The paradoxes of community life

Living life in community presents several challenges. These challenges are explored as a series of paradoxes. The first is the idea that the void, as discussed in the previous section, may contain hidden treasure. The second paradox derives from the idea that the challenge of living in community is worth the sacrifice of individual freedom that community life entails when the hidden treasure is revealed. A third aspect of this is that strength can be seen in weakness, as Paul observed (2 Cor 12:10). By considering these contrasting ideas we can see how disabled people teach others how to live with dependence and so leading to the idea that we all should accept our dependence on God.

### 2.1 The void that contains hidden treasure

When Augustine speaks about 'Memory's huge cavern, with its mysterious, secret, and indescribable nooks and crannies,'<sup>385</sup> he suggests that there is a wealth of valuable ideas stored within this vast space. This could be understood as a recognition that the place of suffering can contain something of value. A simple idea from this is that our memories of bad events can teach us useful lessons for the future. We learn from experience and recollection of even traumatic events can be used as part of the recovery process as happens with psychodynamic therapy, for example. By extension this idea can lead to an understanding that the void, once recognised, can lead to something positive, something valuable, a finding of treasure. Such treasure can come in the form of friendship, something that is very important in the philosophy of L'Arche. Vanier relates the story about the calling of the disciples, in Chapter 1 of John's gospel, in terms of friendship. He describes friendship as 'a deeply human reality, the treasure of each person and the basis of community, as people with the same hope and vision seek meaning to their lives.'<sup>386</sup>

Vanier explains that the human heart is always 'thirsting for presence, creativity, communion, and infinity.'<sup>387</sup> This seems to be another echo of Augustine's 'restless until they rest in thee' idea, and he goes on to say that L'Arche communities strive 'to be a place of authentic

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<sup>385</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*. p. 186.

<sup>386</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 45.

<sup>387</sup> *Man and Woman, God Made Them*. p. 97.

relationships which flower in celebrations of joy, where each one can find the deepest meaning of life and touch the goodness and the beauty of his or her personality.<sup>388</sup> This seems to be part of his eschatological vision, yet one which is very earthly, and in the here-and-now, a place where learning and growth take place.

Community is essentially a place where we learn to live in a way that meets our deepest needs. It is a coming together of people who want to show that it is possible to live, love, celebrate and work together for peace, justice and a better world.<sup>389</sup>

The contrast between the void and the treasure it contains means that treasure can be found in unlikely places, in the vulnerable, those one might call the ‘poor and the lame’ of society. These people are important because they can accept the invitation to the banquet, one which is declined by the rich and powerful. ‘Those who are rejected have time on their hands. They are not yearning for success but for love and community.’<sup>390</sup>

Community is a place where people are known by name. When we spend time with a person, we reveal to them their worth, ‘revealing to that person that he or she is loved, has value and is precious.’<sup>391</sup> When talking about love Vanier is at his best, saying that ‘to love is not primarily *to do* something for someone, but it is to reveal to that person his or her value, not only through listening and tenderness, through love and kindness, but also through a certain competence and faithful commitment.’<sup>392</sup> This relates to relationships, how they work in a best-case scenario.

In the void, once hidden treasure has been found, healing can take place. This is something that Michael Kearney, a doctor who now specialises in palliative medicine, noticed when he spent a year living in the original L’Arche community in Trosly. His observations about what he learnt there include reference to relationships being surpassed when people allow themselves to *be*, without necessarily *doing* anything specific.

L’Arche taught me something important about the healing potential of being in suffering. Of being in suffering with another, of what can happen if we stay in that place together, believing that somehow, something can happen through that experience which is beyond the sum of the two persons in the relationship.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid. p. 97.

<sup>389</sup> J. Vanier, A.S. Andreu, and M. Quoist, *A Door of Hope*(Hodder & Stoughton, 1996). p. 42.

<sup>390</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 58.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid. p. 187.

<sup>392</sup> *Man and Woman, God Made Them*. p. 18.

<sup>393</sup> Michael Kearney speaking in an interview with Tim Kearney in T. Kearney, *A Prophetic Cry: Stories of Spirituality and Healing Inspired by L'Arche*(Veritas, 2000). p 196.

The paradox here is that doing nothing in particular can be so effective because it is enough simply to *be* with the person who is suffering.

The idea of staying in the place of suffering and allowing something negative to continue undisturbed is an idea which Augustine commented on in his exposition of Psalm 149 where he reminds his congregation that the wheat and the weeds are distributed throughout the world, and that they are intermingled. He advises them not to cut themselves off from the rest, so it is not just a matter of not tearing up the weeds, but also of not even trying to separate themselves from those who are destined to be thrown on the fire at the end of the world. If they did separate then ‘Good grain you may be, but the birds would find you if you were outside the threshing area, and they would gobble you up.’<sup>394</sup> He has the same message in the Exposition of Psalm 98 where he says

When weeds are rampant, you will see that you are surrounded by bad people. You may be conscious of a desire to keep the bad people at a distance from yourself, and to exclude all wrongdoers from the Church; but the Lord’s view of the matter gives you your answer: *Let them both grow together until harvest time.*<sup>395</sup>

This has implications for those who have not kept the rules of the Christian community, but this is not the place to explore that issue. An alternative way of looking at the ‘weeds’ is given by Jean Vanier when he says

It is not always easy to listen and be close to other people. They may challenge the things we believe in. To listen attentively to others means taking them into your heart, trying to understand and love them. It means to risk looking clearly at the weeds as well as the healthy seeds in the field of their lives and naming them, without making the person feel guilty.<sup>396</sup>

Here Vanier suggests that there is something to learn from everyone, even people with whom we disagree. Perhaps this idea explains why the gesture Pope Francis made when he washed the feet of prisoners in a juvenile detention centre was so impressive.<sup>397</sup>

## 2.2 The challenges of living in community

Human beings are created as social creatures but this desire to live in communion with others can also present practical problems. Although sometimes L’Arche communities can seem

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<sup>394</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*. p. 494.

<sup>395</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 75-98*, ed. J.E. Rotelle, trans. M. Boulding (New City Press, 2002). pp. 479-80.

<sup>396</sup> J. Vanier, *Heart of L’Arche* (SPCK Publishing, 2013). p 37.

<sup>397</sup> The short homily given by the Pope on this occasion can be found here

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130328\\_coena-domini\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_coena-domini_en.html)



idealistic, Vanier is aware that they need to be realistic.<sup>398</sup> Sometimes sacrifices have to be made, such as when an individual's wishes have to be balanced against the needs of the community. A challenge for L'Arche communities is how to integrate, in an authentic way, the needs of the very varied individuals who make up those communities. This does not mean that individual needs are sublimated for the greater good, but that each member of the community is encouraged to grow and be healed. As Vanier explains, 'Community is a place of healing and therapy, a place of growth and education for each person; it is a place where each one can live authentic and liberating relationships.'<sup>399</sup> In this way it can be seen that a community is more than a group of people who happen to live together, because in a community individuals are brought together like parts of a living body.

True community is a place of covenant; like a family, its members are linked to one another in mutual trust and respect, and by a deep sense of belonging. [...] A family has one soul and one heart. A collection of individuals has neither heart nor soul; it has only rules and a hierarchy of power;<sup>400</sup>

In a covenantal structure such as the one being suggested here, individuals are bound together, not by legally binding contracts, but by their willingness to engage with each other in mutual dependency. In some senses this is counter-cultural, since it requires the individual members to admit their need for each other in humility.

One of the key ways that the L'Arche families build up this sense of community in covenant is through celebrations together. For Vanier a celebration is the place 'where we give thanks to God for having brought us out of the depths of loneliness and into togetherness, community and faithful friendship. We celebrate our bonding.'<sup>401</sup> Celebration is sometimes linked with forgiveness, as in the return of the prodigal son. Forgiveness can be self-forgiveness, or self-acceptance. Thus people with disabilities can accept their own limitations by welcoming the help given by able-bodied people, even when they are not all that competent. This is something that Sumarah observed from his own study, involving participant observation over an eight month period. 'There is a spirit of forgiveness in such communities. I was amazed often at how quickly handicapped people forgave some of my

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<sup>398</sup> Vanier acknowledges that sometimes communities disappoint those who join them, hoping for something which the community cannot achieve. 'The world of community can be full of illusions. I ask forgiveness of all those who came to my community or others of L'Arche, full of enthusiasm, and who felt deceived by our lack of openness, our blocks, our lack of truth and our pride.' J. Vanier, *Community and Growth*(Paulist Pr, 1989). p. 138.

<sup>399</sup> *Man and Woman, God Made Them*. pp. 104-5.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid*. pp. 105-6.

<sup>401</sup> *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 62.

blunders. There is also a spirit of celebration in the communities of L'Arche where people rejoice at growing closer to one another.<sup>402</sup> This shows that not only are people able to celebrate as part of a community but they are also able to recognise their mutual dependence on each other. Awareness of this mutuality is a cause for celebration.

Another expression which is associated with the Vanier approach to community is 'going down the ladder', a phrase he uses to remind people of the need to reach down to those in need rather than striving to climb up the ladder to success in conventional terms. The fact that in some communities those who have disabilities are called 'core members' demonstrates this commitment to giving them pride of place at the heart of the community. Through the process of going down the ladder the nature of relationships is changed from one of imbalance, or hierarchy, where one person is in some sense superior to the other, to one of mutuality, or equality, where both participants are partners in the process of growing closer to God. This idea is expressed by Sumarah as a process of loving and being loved, where

the more one loves and is loved the more one recognises the primacy of loving action. It is through others that one discovers one's relationship with God and it is through God that one discovers one's relationship with others.<sup>403</sup>

By using the idea of discovery Sumarah illustrates that this process is an ongoing one, where the end is never achieved, at least not in this life, but the goal is always to gain greater insights into relationships.

Relationships are a key part of personhood for Vanier. 'To me, every child is a person. A person is defined not by his capacity to reason but by his capacity for relationship.'<sup>404</sup> He then gives an example of how a L'Arche community in Africa took in a child who seemed unable to have any human relationships, having been found in a forest where he had seemingly been raised by animals. Gradually the child grew into a human person, fulfilling his potential for relationships. 'And he has done so thanks to the presence about him of other human beings who awakened his heart, which was buried in the shadowy recesses of his being.'<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Sumarah, *The Therapy of L'Arche: A Model of Shared Living*. pp. 44-45.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid. p. 243.

<sup>404</sup> Vanier and Spink, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle*. pp. 181-2.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. p. 182.

A recent comparative study<sup>406</sup> which examined the role of carers in a L'Arche community and an Independent Living Centre (ILC) in Winnipeg came to the conclusion that the main difference between the two groups is that in the ILC the emphasis is on employment, whereas at L'Arche it is on relationship. There are elements of social and emotional care in both situations, but overall the emphasis is different, if the carer is seen as an employee rather than someone who shares their life with you. At L'Arche there is a greater emphasis on emotional care and sharing of their lives together. Because the ILC workers were concerned about their professionalism they downplayed any social interactions. The other major difference was that in the ILC training was important while at L'Arche it was praying that was important. At L'Arche the term 'formation' might be used in place of training and also they appoint people to accompany the assistants, by way of supporting them in their development.

It is worth remembering here that this research was not looking at Vanier's own philosophy but just at one particular L'Arche community. Sometimes the distinction between L'Arche as a movement and Vanier the man becomes blurred. It is not easy to distinguish one from the other. In some senses Vanier is L'Arche and L'Arche is Vanier, yet we must remember that one man's philosophy can be interpreted in a variety of different ways by those who work for L'Arche. Vanier is not the founder of a religious order and has not tried to impose a uniformity of beliefs on those who belong to L'Arche communities. Many of the young people who come to work as assistants for a year or two on gap-year projects do not share the religious ideals of Vanier.

Vanier says that through living with such people as Raphael and Philippe he learnt that all humans thirst for communion. This means more than just enjoying the company of others, however. It means being generous, vulnerable and understanding. 'Communion is founded on mutual trust in which a person gives to and receives from another that which is deepest and most silent in their being.'<sup>407</sup> Communion, he points out, is not the same as collaboration which is when people work together towards a common goal. For communion there needs to be an element of vulnerability. 'When people are enjoying success they look above all for admiration, but when they feel weak they seek communion.'<sup>408</sup> In this way he explains how it

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<sup>406</sup> C. Kelly, "The Role of Mandates/Philosophies in Shaping Interactions between Disabled People and Their Support Providers," *Disability & Society* 25, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>407</sup> Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences*. p. 35.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

is from the place of anguish and pain that people are driven to belong to a community, or to seek out friendship. The topic of vulnerability will be discussed below in section three.

Living in community is not always easy, however.

Is the L'Arche community made up above all of assistants with similar motivations who freely choose to come, or is it above all the people in need who did not have this free choice but were placed? We do not want two communities – the helpers and the helped – we want one. That is the theory, but there is a tendency for the assistants to make their own community. Truly to make community with the poorest is harder and demands a certain death to self.<sup>409</sup>

This 'death to self' is more than simply being considerate about the needs of others because it requires an acceptance of weakness in oneself, so that those who are nominally strong can identify more closely with those who are, at least superficially, weak. The idea that accepting weakness brings rewards leads to the next paradox, that of community versus individuality. Members of a community have to set aside their individualism but this sacrifice can be rewarded by the contrasting benefits of the freedom to enjoy the blessings of friendship.

The idea of liberation coming from those who are poor and marginalised can be seen in an article by Angrosino who considers the counter-cultural aspect of L'Arche. Angrosino asks what L'Arche means by its claim to be countercultural, a sign of contradiction. What evidence is there to support this claim? He wants to know what L'Arche means by the term counterculture and also how it works in practice. He did not use interviews, but instead used the published writings which he describes as 'the vehicle by which members of a far-flung international movement communicate with each other and by which they are made known to the outside world.'<sup>410</sup> He chose to use the *Letters of L'Arche* from 1984 to 2001, this being a quarterly journal published by the Daybreak foundation. Here he is, explaining how L'Arche works:

The L'Arche household becomes a new kind of family in which accepted social and cultural definitions of gender, class, and status become meaningless. Even the expected distinction between caretakers and patients is erased. The residents with disabilities effect healing in the assistants just as much as the latter bring healing to the disabled. And healing, to be sure, is not a matter of curing the afflictions in a biomedical sense – the very erasure of the distinction is itself the essence of social

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<sup>409</sup> *Community and Growth*. p. 91.

<sup>410</sup> M.V. Angrosino, "L'Arche: The Phenomenology of Christian Counterculturalism," *Qualitative Inquiry* 9, no. 6 (2003). p. 935.

healing. As in the Kingdom, the residents of L'Arche (both those with disabilities and their assistants) are all healed so that they are empowered to be healers in return.<sup>411</sup>

Being empowered conveys the idea of a prophet who is sent out on a mission, something that requires power to accomplish. The prophet is also someone who works in a counter-cultural way to overcome stereotypes and assumptions of the normal world they inhabit.<sup>412</sup>

### 2.3 The strength that can be seen in weakness

The link between these ideas is that self-sacrifice frees the person to be available to look after those who are crying out, from the void of their being, for love. Mary gives birth to the church when she stands at the foot of the cross, where she is crying out in pain, with an aching void because of the loss of her son. From that place of kenosis<sup>413</sup> she reaches out to John, who reaches out to her. Their mutual support of each other, in the depths of their pain, is the place where community is born. The community is able to celebrate together, because the lost have been found, the dead have been raised. The community celebrates because it is a place where liberation comes, freedom from the captivity of loneliness.

Letting go of self, following the example of Jesus, allows us to be free of the things that hold us back from giving our life for others. Vanier says that this giving of one's life can be understood in three ways. First, as 'communicating to another all that is precious and that gives life so that others may live this treasure as well.'<sup>414</sup> The second meaning is 'giving oneself to another in total trust and love.'<sup>415</sup> The third meaning is 'risking my life'.<sup>416</sup>

Giving of oneself involves giving up something, denying something, trusting that the gift will be rewarded in some way, or at least be productive. Risking one's life means more than minor self-denial, however. To risk means to take a chance that the gift will not be repaid at all. This requires an admission of vulnerability and weakness. The alternative to such an admission is to fail to accept who we are.

If we deny our weakness and the reality of death, if we want to be powerful and strong always, we deny a part of who we are, this mixture of strength and weakness. To be human is to accept and love others just as they are, weaknesses and strengths,

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid. p. 943-4.

<sup>412</sup> 'By demonstrating the possibility of living in ways that radically upend the values, assumptions, and life ways of the mainstream, L'Arche announces itself not simply as another do-gooding organisation but as a countercultural witness – a living exemplar of the original Jesus movement.' *ibid.* p. 950.

<sup>413</sup> The term kenosis, meaning emptying, comes from the Greek word *ekenosen*, as it is used to describe Christ in Phil 2:7 'but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.'

<sup>414</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 191.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

because we need each other. Weakness, recognized, accepted, and offered, is at the heart of belonging, so it is at the heart of communion with another.<sup>417</sup>

This illustrates an important aspect of Vanier's idea of what it means to be human, that of accepting that everyone has both strengths and weaknesses. Developing from this is the idea that acceptance of the void is a necessary precursor to belonging. To an extent people might have to relinquish the need for security, especially the security that comes from belonging. This is only possible, Vanier argues, when 'we know we are loved and held by Jesus.'<sup>418</sup> This is a return to the familiar topic of knowing we are loved by God. He amplifies this theme when he says that

To die to self and rise up in love will come gently as we touch and care for wounded, weak bodies; as we enter into a person-to-person, heart-to-heart relationship with them, as we let them touch and transform our hearts.<sup>419</sup>

In practical terms, what does it mean to 'die to self'? One example comes from a collection of stories about L'Arche which includes this account of an ordinary, everyday meal. "To love someone is to waste time with them" says Jean Vanier. It is so important to 'waste' time, simply to enjoy the gift of the person.<sup>420</sup> This conveys the idea of sacrifice, from the reference to wasting time, but also of the great benefits that emerge when that sacrifice is made.<sup>421</sup> To make sacrifices requires an acceptance of vulnerability, and this paradox is explored in the next section.

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<sup>417</sup> *Becoming Human*(House of Anansi Pr, 2008). p. 40.

<sup>418</sup> *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 217.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid*. p. 217.

<sup>420</sup> Maggie Smith speaking about her experience in L'Arche Kent in H. Wilson, *My Life Together: L'Arche Communities and the Challenge of Unity*(Darton Longman & Todd, 2004). p. 14.

<sup>421</sup> For another L'Arche member, someone who has been in a leadership role in L'Arche Daybreak, in Canada, belonging to a community requires sacrifice which comes from the heart in order to participate in God's work. "I see him calling me to take part in his passion. In his redemptive ministry. I believe that's one of the greatest dignities bestowed upon us, to take part in God's redemptive ministry. Serving our neighbours, helping in salvation. Suffering is redemptive as we see on the cross. That's God's ace in the hole. His wild card that he played in the end. Death was death and now it is life. I've felt that, and it has been such a painful experience, but I can see the other end and these people in community are instruments of God. I can see this in terms of a call to community, to greater growth, a call to greater love. Greater sacrificial love." Doug's story in Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. p. 164.

### 3. Vulnerability

Thomas Reynolds argues that vulnerability is an essential component of being human.<sup>422</sup> We are completely dependent on other human beings for our survival at birth and even once we are grown to adulthood we are still dependent on others for developing into the people that we become. Not only are we dependent on others in the developmental stages of our lives but as adults, too, we need other people. Reynolds even goes so far as to say that ‘Disability is an element intrinsic to human flourishing.’<sup>423</sup> He reasons here that being unable to be independent of others allows us to develop in important ways, and that this development would not happen without our lack of ability to survive alone. Thus vulnerability becomes not a nuisance but an essential part of our humanity.<sup>424</sup>

As has been mentioned in the discussion above about the challenges of living a community life, life in a L’Arche community is not always easy. Vanier explains this in terms of poverty saying that ‘The poor are at the heart of the Church. But their cry can disturb us. It is not always easy to be with them.’<sup>425</sup> The challenge is to recognise that, ‘behind our roles, and the masks we often wear, we are all vulnerable and struggling human beings whose hearts are more needy than we would dare to admit at times.’<sup>426</sup> This recognition of the vulnerability that lies beneath each person enables greater compassion to be shown to those who can, admittedly, be difficult to live with.

In a talk given to a group of religious Vanier claims that L’Arche is a prophetic sign for the world. Speaking about the prophet Hosea, Vanier’s description includes the three themes of this section of suffering, daring and hope.

The Valley of Achor, which signifies the valley of misery, was a deep and notoriously dangerous gorge near Jericho. [...] And then Hosea announces that God, in a loving encounter, will speak to our hearts and turn this valley into a gateway of hope. It will no longer be a place to be avoided. If we dare enter it, we will discover that it leads to life. If, after an experience of God’s tenderness, we can dare enter the world of our own darkness, where our demons lurk, and enter also the world of suffering and poverty around us and in us, then we will be liberated from our fears. No longer will

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<sup>422</sup> ‘All people are linked indissolubly, sharing a fundamental condition: vulnerable personhood.’ T.E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Baker Publishing Group, 2008). p. 105. Reynolds also draws on the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre’s, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid. p. 106.

<sup>424</sup> As Simone Weil has observed ‘The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because vulnerability is a mark of existence.’ S. Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (University of Nebraska Press, 1952). p. 161.

<sup>425</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 353.

<sup>426</sup> Kearney, *A Prophetic Cry: Stories of Spirituality and Healing Inspired by L’Arche*. p. 76.

we need to run away into the stars, into power and into superiority. We will become messengers of hope.<sup>427</sup>

Prophets must face suffering as they dare to enter into the darkness. Their thankfulness when they are freed from their fears enables them to proclaim a message of hope to the world.

These three themes, then, of suffering, daring and hope are explored in the following section.

### 3.1 Suffering

The idea that we learn through suffering is one which is explored by the philosopher Simone Weil in her essay, *Waiting on God*, where she argues that joy and suffering are both valuable. 'Joy and suffering are two equally precious gifts which must both of them be savoured to the full, each one in its purity without trying to mix them. Through joy, the beauty of the world penetrates our soul. Through suffering it penetrates our body.'<sup>428</sup> There is a danger in this way of thinking, mistakenly, that suffering is somehow good in itself. Such thinking would lead to the idea that perhaps God has deliberately made people suffer for some reason which eludes us. As Reynolds points out, 'Suffering is not a good, but a consequence of love's risk opening itself to become available for the other'.<sup>429</sup> Here he is referring to the willingness of God to share in humanity's suffering by the incarnation. This underlines the place of suffering in humanity as something that God was willing to embrace as an act of love.<sup>430</sup>

As well as accepting the place of suffering in humanity, L'Arche recognises and responds to the cry of loneliness, the cry for recognition, the question 'am I of value?' that is in the heart of every person, and of course, in particular, in those who have an intellectual impairment. Such people Vanier says are intellectually poor, but the poor can also be those who are caught up in sin, or those who are sad, alone, feeling guilty, feeling unloved. Their needs call for people to leave their economic security and to become poor themselves, in order to help others. Such people will hunger and thirst for justice, to be willing to welcome the stranger, to welcome those who are poor, in all the ways he has described. Those who are weak have been entrusted to us, just as Jesus was entrusted to the care of Joseph.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences*. p. 251.

<sup>428</sup> Simone Weil, "Waiting on God: Letters and Essays," (New York: Harper Collins, 1950). p. 73.

<sup>429</sup> Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. p. 204.

<sup>430</sup> Reynolds explains this as taking place when 'Jesus's availability to God becomes identified with God's availability to humanity, such that tragedy is incorporated into the divine life. In Christ, the truly human person, God takes up the suffering of the world.' *ibid.* p. 205.

<sup>431</sup> These ideas are adapted from Vanier, Andreu, and Quoist, *A Door of Hope*. This relates in particular to the section entitled 'Act Justly'.



While discussing what it means to be human, Vanier draws on the work of a French geologist, Xavier Le Pichon.<sup>432</sup>

In his fascinating book, *Aux Racines de l'homme*, or *The Roots of Humanity*, he shows that, throughout different stages of the evolution of humanity, people have become more human as they opened up to the weak and to the reality of suffering and death. That is also my personal experience. As the human heart opens up and becomes compassionate, we discover our fundamental unity, our common humanity.<sup>433</sup>

In order to be able to open up in this way we have to accept our vulnerability and be aware of the vulnerability of others. There is a two-way process of recognising that shared vulnerability and thus being able to respond to the needs of the other. The particular role of the poor here (and the poor can be people with learning disabilities, as well as those who are poor in material resources) is to allow others to learn from their poverty. In this way the poor are prophets who proclaim the truth of their vulnerability with humility.

The idea of prophetic voices occurs in *Jesus, the Gift of Love* where he says that Jesus chose to start his mission by announcing the Good News to the poor, 'for they are the foundation stone of this new and wonderful edifice.'<sup>434</sup> He goes on to instruct his disciples that this mission requires them to engage in

Working together in love, respectful of the call and place of each one, especially of the weak and the little, listening to them; hearing their prophetic voices calling for change, respectful also of all those who are different and in whom the light of God is present but hidden.<sup>435</sup>

A call for change, here, means calling those who are living comfortable, yet isolated lives, into relationship with those who are poor. The rationale for having a relationship with the poor is clearly illustrated by Pope Francis who writes

I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them

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<sup>432</sup> Xavier Le Pichon is described by Reinders as 'a former resident of L'Arche, where he lived with his family (which included two disabled children)'. H.S. Reinders, *The Paradox of Disability: Responses to Jean Vanier and L'Arche Communities from Theology and the Sciences*(Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010). p. 10. Le Pichon also contributed a chapter to this book which collates the papers given at a conference which took place in Trosly-Breuil, the home of the first L'Arche community, in March 2007.

<sup>433</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*. p. 97.

<sup>434</sup> *Jesus, the Gift of Love*(Crossroads, 1996). p. 93.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid*. p. 93.

at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.<sup>436</sup>

Here Pope Francis justifies the need for reaching out to the poor not in order to give them something from our own resources, but so that they can evangelise us, convert us, give us insights into God's mysteries through our contact with them.

When we speak of suffering there is always at the heart of the discussion the idea of theodicy, or the question of how a good God can permit innocent suffering. John Swinton argues that early Christian communities did not concern themselves with questions of theodicy. Instead he says that they responded to suffering by trying to 'develop faithful forms of community within which the impact of evil and suffering could be absorbed, resisted, and transformed as they waited for God's return.'<sup>437</sup> So their response was a practical, not a theoretical one, where having a community that could cope with inevitable suffering was more important than asking theoretical questions about that suffering. Their hope for a future with God as triumphant over suffering sustained them through the temporary difficulties of their transient lives. In order to build on this, Swinton looks at some of the ways that Christians can respond to suffering with practices that he calls 'individual and communal enactments of God's redemptive movements within creation.'<sup>438</sup> This seems to capture the idea that humans are co-creators with God, that humans have a part to play in the unfolding of God's plan for creation. By facing up to the challenges that this brings, challenges of how to live and work together as a community, we can develop strategies to respond to the reality of evil. Later Swinton explains that 'the goal and endpoint of practical theodicy is the enabling of the Christian community to live faithfully *despite* the presence of evil.'<sup>439</sup> This clearly states that theodicy is a matter for communities, not individuals alone.

The theme of suffering in the context of sacrifice can be identified when David Ford attempts to bring a theologian's view of L'Arche in a chapter entitled 'L'Arche and Jesus: What is the theology?' Here he is speaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus, saying that this mystery

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<sup>436</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (Catholic Truth Society, 2013). # 198. p. 100. This recent Apostolic Exhortation is an encouragement to all the faithful to make proclaiming the Gospel a priority in today's world.

<sup>437</sup> J. Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007). p. 35.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid. p. 81.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

creates a community which can remember his death and resurrection, and in the light of that can refuse to repress or run away from suffering, evil or death. Resurrection is not an escape from life and death, but a sending deeper into life that which has been baptised in death.<sup>440</sup>

The idea that resurrection sends us 'deeper into life' is an important one, because it suggests that the new life of the resurrection is stronger, more profound and more vibrant than our present life. Because we cannot comprehend a life that is *more* alive than our current one it is difficult to imagine what it would be like to live the life of the resurrection.

The context of Ford's remarks about resurrection is that it followed a discussion about death which took place at Trosly where one of the residents (Antonio) was dying. He talks about a change in thinking about the death of Christ from regarding death as a problem that has been solved, instead accepting death as an inevitable part of life. Even though we still have to suffer, just as Christ suffered, we are encouraged by the knowledge that Christ was able to endure his sufferings, and was given strength through the Holy Spirit. Thus we are able to endure our sufferings and are given strength from the faithful community which surrounds us. The idea that Christ died for us does not mean we are no longer involved, but instead it means we are even more involved in a personal way. By accompanying on their journey those who are dying we are denying death the power to crush us, denying death the last word by not allowing those who are dying to be isolated and forgotten.<sup>441</sup>

Being able to accompany a dying person on the final stages of their life is not easy, but, as John Swinton points out, suffering is an inevitable part of our existence, but something which can be transformed by love.<sup>442</sup>

To love requires fragility and vulnerability. It requires an opening up to the other in a way that inevitably makes the lover vulnerable and open to being either loved or broken. [...] Genuine love means opening oneself up to the possibility of rejection.<sup>443</sup>

This illustrates the value of accepting weakness even if this means giving up the desire for power and strength. This giving up is a form of kenosis, of emptying out the striving for success. An example of this is found in what Sumarah calls 'gift relationships'. These are

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<sup>440</sup> David Ford, "L'Arche and Jesus: What Is the Theology?," in *Encounter with Mystery: Reflections on L'Arche and Living with Disability*, ed. FM Young (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997). p. 78.

<sup>441</sup> 'The mutual reflecting of glory that was going on between Antonio and his community is a testimony that challenges the dictatorial power of death over so many areas of life, and is a subversive sign of the kingdom of God.' *ibid.* p. 79.

<sup>442</sup> For a comprehensive account of ways to care for dying patients see C.M. Saunders, M. Baines, and R.J. Dunlop, *Living with Dying: A Guide to Palliative Care* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>443</sup> Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. pp. 65-66.

relationships where people give of themselves not for financial reward, as is the case for those who are professional carers, but for less tangible rewards. He points out that accepting one's weakness is the way to gain strength from the interdependence of being with and needing other people.<sup>444</sup> To empty oneself requires a certain level of courage and this is further explored in the following section on daring.

### 3.2 Daring

The poor call for a change of heart, calling us to be tender, forgiving, and calling us to emerge from behind the walls that we build to protect ourselves from encounter. There are several reasons why this can be a painful process, one which requires courage and daring. 'The Lord hears the cry of the poor' but it is easier for people to ignore their cry and to stay comfortably on safe ground, doing only what is within easy reach. We do not want to be challenged or to change. This means we can be troubled by the call of the poor. As Vanier explains,

the poor disturb me. Their prophetic cry for understanding, friendship and opportunity, has revealed to me my hardness, selfishness, sin and my resistance to change. They have revealed how imprisoned I am in my own fears and in my own culture.<sup>445</sup>

Rather than seeing them as people who make him uncomfortable, Vanier sees the poor as the roots, the parts which supply nourishment to the tree. Those hidden people are vital parts of the community, bringing life and nourishment to all. The poor are not far away, either, as they can be 'any of us who are sad and alone, feeling guilty and unloved.'<sup>446</sup>

Michael Downey also suggests that a strength of L'Arche is the way that it helps people dare to confront suffering and death, by facilitating the engagement with people who are seriously ill.

Ultimate knowledge and truth are gained in situations of vulnerability, especially in encounter with those who bear very visibly signs of death in their bodies or in the moments of agony and suffering in any human life. Such encounters give rise to the startling truth: in weakness we are born.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> 'The strength is really a recognition that one needs others to be fulfilled, that one cannot live in isolation as a strong and independent person. According to Vanier, the handicapped have an acceptance of their inadequacies and therefore welcome personal relationships with people who are lovingly interested in them.' Sumarah, *The Therapy of L'Arche: A Model of Shared Living*. p. 42.

<sup>445</sup> Vanier, Andreu, and Quoist, *A Door of Hope*. p. 74.

<sup>446</sup> Vanier, *The Broken Body*. p. 45.

<sup>447</sup> Downey, *A Blessed Weakness: The Spirit of Jean Vanier and L'Arche*. p. 70.

This is a reminder that we come into the world as completely dependent, weak creatures, but creatures who have the power to evoke love from those around us.

The dependence of the infant is clear for all to see. The difficulty for us as adults, however, is that we want to hide our dependence, our vulnerability, our disabilities. In order to do this we put up barriers and hide behind masks of normality and independence. It is because we are vulnerable that we hide what lies beneath the surface. But that most hidden part can become part of a relationship with Jesus. When speaking of the journey Jesus made when he walked across the lake<sup>448</sup>, Vanier suggests that this represents the passage from childhood to adulthood, when we have to move to a hidden relationship with Jesus. He calls this ‘a mutuality of love and friendship that is more hidden and humble.’<sup>449</sup> This idea of something hidden emerges again later when he asks,

Can we dare to accept that we are bonded to people as they are, with all their imperfections, and that God is hidden in them, just as he was hidden in the broken Jesus? Can we dare to discover God hidden in our own brokenness and poverty?<sup>450</sup>

By daring to face our fears we are able to encounter the close support of God through the storm, as the disciples did in the boat. In order to survive the storm we need hope that there will be light in the morning.

### 3.3 Hoping

The concept of hope is one of the three theological virtues described by Paul in 1 Cor 13:13.<sup>451</sup> ‘Hope, in its widest acceptation, is described as the desire of something together with the expectation of obtaining it. The Scholastics say that it is a movement of the appetite towards a future good, which though hard to attain is possible of attainment.’<sup>452</sup> Hope is, therefore, a key virtue of eschatology, since hope permits us to think about the future life of the world to come. Hope gives meaning to actions we perform even when those actions do not have immediate effect. The reason we can dare to reach out to the poor is because we have hope that our courage will be rewarded. Hope is crucial to our faith in the resurrection. When ministering to prisoners in Haiti Vanier recounts how he spoke to them, giving them this message of hope:

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<sup>448</sup> John 6: 19

<sup>449</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 123.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid. p. 312.

<sup>451</sup> ‘And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.’

<sup>452</sup> Definition from the Catholic Encyclopedia accessed online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07465b.htm> on 15.12.13.

My hope is that one day we will live a resurrection and that your inner beauty will then burst forth and be recognised by all. You know, as I know, that deep within you, beyond everything that has gone wrong, there is a child yearning for tenderness.<sup>453</sup>

For prisoners, and for all people, perhaps, the desire is for freedom from fear, freedom from the physical or mental prisons that cause suffering in this world. Hope is believing that, like Lazarus, we can one day be free from all that binds us, and Vanier believes that the path to freedom is one that anyone can walk, although it is a struggle. He outlines seven steps to freedom<sup>454</sup>, which can be summarised as:

1. Recognise how fear can be used in a positive way by teaching us where change is necessary.
2. Be humble enough to acknowledge your limitations.
3. Discover how to learn from disasters, from the times when things go wrong.
4. Find someone to accompany you on your journey to freedom.
5. Seek out good role models.
6. Accept that some of the journey to freedom will be painful.
7. Admit your need for God.

Vanier stresses that these steps are for everyone, not just for those great men and women, like Martin Luther King. We can all have a dream of freedom and all we need to do is to ‘trust in the liberating force of God’s love.’<sup>455</sup> This is truly a message of hope not only for individuals but for the whole of humanity.

When the psychologist Kevin Reimer states that ‘Hope is the gift of disability to moral maturity’<sup>456</sup> he means that disability can demonstrate something of value for those who wish to develop higher levels of moral behaviour. As a result of witnessing the suffering of people with disabilities, the assistants at L’Arche, Reimer observes, develop their own moral reasoning and develop wisdom. This happens because they are able to learn from their observations of and interactions with the core members. This learning process can take a long time, but in the end assistants develop the kind of hope that can let go of control, and instead allows “what will be” to happen. Perhaps this happens because the assistants are able to realise how core members have trust and hope, in spite of their disabilities and limitations.

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<sup>453</sup> Vanier, Andreu, and Quoist, *A Door of Hope*. p. 59.

<sup>454</sup> These steps are summarised from a section of Vanier, *Becoming Human*. pp. 125-132.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid. pp. 133-134.

<sup>456</sup> Reimer, *Living L’Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. p. 126. These are the words of Nancy, an assistant in a L’Arche community in North America.

This is illustrated in the story of one of the assistants who had accompanied a group on a pilgrimage to Guadalupe. On her return she reflected on what she had learnt:

There was so much in the journey that you could never have planned – the kind of spontaneous trust that you take one step at a time. It certainly taught me that it's OK to have that spontaneity. [...] It's that whole sense of spontaneous hope, that sense of service. It's not what you give, it's what you are. How you are. To never lock the doors if someone comes knocking.<sup>457</sup>

This story contains elements of daring, as described in the previous section, but is also an account of how hope enables people to be daring, to take risks. Sometimes those risks are related to other people, for example when the risk of rejection is involved. In one of Vanier's earlier books he explores what it is like to need another person and how important it is to feel that we matter to another person. He talks about the longing to be in communion with the other and yet the fear of rejection that prevents us from giving ourselves fully. He says that we need to pray to the Holy Spirit to give us the courage to reach out to others.

Our hope is to become freer each day in order to accept others, to be fully present to them. That is our hope. It is only in that way we will be able to give life. Come, Holy Spirit, give us hearts of peace and warmth which can serve as a refuge for those who suffer. Come, help us be present one to another.<sup>458</sup>

Here he indicates the important role of the Holy Spirit in sustaining hope and giving people the confidence to be present for others. Writing in the sixties, Vanier was impressed with the way young people were rejecting the attitudes and beliefs of their parents and were challenging the established norms of the world they had been brought up in. He felt that young people were the hope of the future if they could manage to build a better world than the one they had inherited.

The young have had enough of those who value only social esteem and money. They are desperately impatient for a new experience which places an absolute in sincerity and rejects all hypocrisy. If we believe in God, we must follow this inner belief and meet this God of love and of mercy and of tenderness and of justice. It is He who calls forth in us a dynamism of the Spirit and who breaks down the barriers which have been built up on our land of fear.<sup>459</sup>

This illustrates how the young need the Holy Spirit to help them with the challenging task of building a better world. Vanier recognised that some of the young people who come to work

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid. p. 150.

<sup>458</sup> J. Vanier, *Eruption to Hope* (Griffin House Graphics, Limited, 1971). p. 33.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

at L'Arche are critical of the way that previous generations have neglected care for the earth and its peoples and want to make a difference in their own generations and he sees that as a sign of hope for the future.

Without any doubt, hope lies in lives motivated by the Holy Spirit, lives that are poor and genuine, in which we renounce the values and the wisdom of the world so as to adopt the values and wisdom of God, of compassion and the Gospels.<sup>460</sup>

From vulnerability we move now into the penultimate section of this chapter, where the transformation from suffering to glory is considered.

#### 4. Transformation, or transfiguration: the result of exposure to suffering

The philosopher Havi Carel, who suffers from a serious life-limiting illness, explores the nature of illness from a philosophical perspective and offers some useful insights about transformation. She writes

I view illness as a life-transforming process, in which there is plenty of bad but also, surprisingly, some good. The richness and diversity of experiences, the surprising and uncontrollable changes, the ways in which life is transformed by illness, are what this book is about.<sup>461</sup>

In her book Carel argues that it is possible to be ill and still able to live a good life and to enjoy that life. From her phenomenological approach to illness she is able to offer guidance not just to those who are ill, but also to medical practitioners so that they can gain a clearer understanding of the lives of their patients.

From a theological perspective Oliver Davies argues that 'Transformation Theology seeks to make explicit here what is already implicit in faith: namely that Christ is real, that he genuinely shares our space and time, and that he is known in power as the one who effects change, through the Holy Spirit.'<sup>462</sup> This raises the status of the discussion of suffering from a level which simply tries to support those who are suffering into one about the incarnational and sacramental content of suffering. The one who suffers can become a vehicle for transmission of the sacred into the ordinary lives of men and women. Christ, who suffered,

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>461</sup> Havi Carel, *Illness: The Cry of the Flesh* (Acumen Publishing, Limited, 2013). p.14.

<sup>462</sup> Oliver Davies, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (OUP Oxford, 2013). p. 18.



comes to share the sufferings of people who themselves become witnesses to the presence of Christ in 'our space and time'.

These two different voices, one philosophical and the other theological, suggest that it can be helpful to consider suffering from the point of view of a transformation which can bring benefits to the sufferer. From the Christian perspective, the message of Easter is one of hope since suffering and death have been transformed into a glorious resurrection, Christ's triumph over death. When she met the risen Jesus in the garden Mary Magdalene was told not to cling to Jesus, because he had been transformed. This section looks at the interaction of suffering, transformation and revelation.

#### 4.1 Revelation through suffering

For Weil 'the chief use of suffering [...] is to teach me that I am nothing.'<sup>463</sup> She is warning here that it is a mistake to think that God sends suffering to us for some purpose or other. Instead we should look upon suffering as a means to acknowledge our inability to act and our helplessness. In this sense it is wrong to try to find meaning in suffering. Instead we should wait and simply 'touch the silence of God.'<sup>464</sup>

The healing potential of suffering has already been mentioned in the section above about the paradox of the void which contains treasure. This links to the idea that suffering, and the witness of those who suffer, can bring about transformation. This can happen because when we are most weak, most vulnerable, most needy, is the very time that Jesus comes to us.

He comes into that part of our being that is our treasure, that sacred space within us, hidden under all the fears, walls and anger in us, so that we may grow in the spirit of love.<sup>465</sup>

This passage does not directly speak of suffering leading to God, but the 'fear, walls and anger' are all forms of suffering. Vanier is describing how the most hidden part of ourselves, which may be the place of suffering, can be where God meets us. The love that is revealed was always there, but had been hidden. To reveal is to show something that was present but not seen or recognised and thus a transformation comes from within. Vanier is sure that love and respect can transform people, especially wounded people. This transformation will

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<sup>463</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*. p. 165.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

<sup>465</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 35.

happen when the love of another person reveals what might otherwise have been hidden.

Vanier explains that

People with disabilities who have been rejected or abandoned rise up with new energy and creativity when they feel loved and respected. [...] The presence of someone who loves them reveals to them their value and importance.<sup>466</sup>

Vanier links this to the death and resurrection of Jesus, as he comments on the Gospel of John. Vanier reminds us that ‘from the wound in his side flowed the waters that vivify and heal us. Through his wounds we are healed.’<sup>467</sup> This then leads to an eschatological concept of wounds in the heavenly kingdom where ‘we, too, will show our wounds when we are with him in the kingdom, revealing our brokenness and the healing power of Jesus.’<sup>468</sup> The ideas here are reminiscent of Augustine’s belief that the martyrs will still have their wounds in the eschaton. For Vanier the martyrs include any who are wounded, in fact they include everyone since we are all wounded, we all have marks and scars because of our human condition.

The revelation that one is loved is not confined only to those who have disabilities. Vanier, in common with others who have worked in L’Arche communities, explains how the people they are trying to help turn the tables by bringing insights to their carers. An example is Eric, of whom Vanier has this to say:

Eric has revealed to me that what is most precious in me is my heart. He has shown me that my head and hands are of value only to the degree that they are at the service of love and covenant relationships that flow from the covenant with Jesus. His weakness, his fragility, his trust, have awakened me and called me forth, and, I dare say, are leading me on the road to healing and wholeness. He is calling me from the isolation of my pride, and of my fears, into compassion, understanding, tenderness and community.<sup>469</sup>

The phrase ‘called me forth’ is reminiscent of Jesus when he calls Lazarus forth from the tomb. The transformation of Lazarus, from death to life, is similar to the transformations that L’Arche communities witness when those who have been imprisoned in tombs because of their disabilities are welcomed into the life of a loving community. It is also a transformation that can happen to anyone, not just those who have disabilities. Vanier puts it this way:

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid. p. 128.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid. p. 345.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid. p. 346.

<sup>469</sup> Vanier, Andreu, and Quoist, *A Door of Hope*. p. 69. This is from the keynote address to the World Council of Churches, meeting in Vancouver in 1983.

As the stone is gradually removed from our inner tomb and the dirt is revealed, we discover that we are loved and forgiven; then under the power of love and of the Spirit, the tomb becomes a womb. A miracle seems to happen. The heart revives in purity. We discover, through the grace of God, a new life, born in the Spirit.<sup>470</sup>

Thus a kind of resurrection takes place, one which prefigures our ultimate resurrection at the end of time. It is a resurrection that involves transformation and being beloved is part of this. Speaking of the heart Vanier says that ‘it leads us out of the restricted belonging, which creates exclusion, to meet and love others just as they are.’<sup>471</sup> Furthermore ‘The heart is the place of our “oneness” with others.’<sup>472</sup> This leads to the tentative suggestion about how Vanier might answer the ‘how will you know me?’ question. Maybe the parents will know their daughter by being in solidarity with her heart. They will be one. We will be one with God, who knows our hearts. When Vanier speaks of a place of identification he might understand heaven as being the place where we can know people, and recognise them, even better than we know them here on earth. It can be argued that we never truly know someone, and in some cases we do not even know ourselves, but God knows us completely.<sup>473</sup>

An account from the early days of L’Arche, when it was celebrating only ten years since its foundation, contains a description of a pilgrimage that the Trosly community made to Lourdes. The author observes that when they returned home the L’Arche residents were moved to pray for the sick people they had seen there. One of them said, ‘The sick are the ones who bring much comfort to us, the healthy. They revive us.’<sup>474</sup> This is interesting in that the person speaking did not consider himself to be sick, even though others may have regarded him as such, and that he felt healed in some way by being with those who were sick.

Another contributor to Kearney’s book is Ruth Patterson, a Presbyterian minister who works in the North of Ireland, who describes an occasion when she was in Trosly at a service sitting next to Bernard, who has Down’s syndrome.

At one point there was beautiful music and I looked around at his face and never in my life have I seen such a beatific expression. I metaphorically took off my shoes, I felt it was holy ground. I felt that here in this person who cannot speak and who has

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<sup>470</sup> Vanier, *Community and Growth*. p. 28.

<sup>471</sup> *Becoming Human*. p. 85.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86.

<sup>473</sup> This is the theme of Book X of Augustine’s *Confessions*.

<sup>474</sup> B. Clarke, *Enough Room for Joy: Jean Vanier's L'Arche: A Message for Our Time* (McClelland and Stewart, 1974). p. 130.

very little rational thought process, the Spirit of God dwells fully, and it was such a moving moment.<sup>475</sup>

This is one of the many examples of those who have discovered the transforming effects of being alongside those with learning difficulties, effects which are particularly manifest in worship, but which can also be found in the ordinary activities of the day.<sup>476</sup> The topic of transformation will be further explored in the following section.

#### 4.2 The Transformation process

Transformation begins from a place of weakness, even though it does not bring about a miracle cure. The transformation does not take away the weakness or remove the suffering, but it does bring about a profound change. ‘The presence of God transforms us even if we are still left in the midst of our human frailness.’<sup>477</sup> Thus Vanier argues that in this life, at least, we should not expect perfect healing, because we are all wounded. The healing which transformation brings is a healing of the heart, not the body.

I believe that God can change the interior life of our hearts, through the revelation that we are loved, and lovable, that we are of value, and loved by God, just as we are, with all our resistance and our darkness as well as with all our gifts. There is no need to be perfect; we are – each one of us is a beloved child of God, called to become a dwelling place for God. In loving us, God gives us life and the strength to grow ever deeper in love towards a new wholeness.<sup>478</sup>

Such healing is not without pain because it requires humility, letting go of personal ambition. There is also the suggestion that being healed does not mean we are made into perfect people. This might suggest that the transformation to be experienced in the eschaton does not mean people with disabilities will be cured in the traditional sense as the term would apply in this earthly life. The transformation is a spiritual one, a form of liberation, as he explains:

This descent into the heart is a tunnel of pain, but also a liberation of love. It is painful as the barriers of egoism, and of the need to prove ourselves and to be recognised for

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<sup>475</sup> Ruth Patterson speaking in an interview with Tim Kearney in Kearney, *A Prophetic Cry: Stories of Spirituality and Healing Inspired by L'Arche*. p. 151.

<sup>476</sup> Jeff Doucette, a L'Arche assistant in Canada has written in a blog about his experiences which echo the themes above of transformation. <http://jeffdoucette.webs.com/apps/blog/entries/show/10376784-more-reign-of-god-moments-from-l-arche-daybreak> ‘It was in the daily living, those intimate moments we spent one on one driving, walking, sharing, getting groceries, preparing meals, praying at Dayspring chapel, eating, laughing, crying that a transformation began to set in. We can so easily think we are going to go there and be the heroes, the care-givers. But in reality we were going to live in their home. I soon began to wonder who had the mission here? I began to realize that the core members also were agents of transformation...they were my Reign of God.’

<sup>477</sup> Vanier, *Man and Woman, God Made Them*. p. 23.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid. p. 121.

our glory, crack and break. It is a liberation as the child in us is reborn and the selfish adult dies.<sup>479</sup>

Those who have learning disabilities are much less likely than those with high academic competence to suffer from egoism. Vanier's core members have little concern for achieving personal glory. Their child-like hearts are already closer to that liberation of love which he describes. In this sense they are closer to their eschatological destiny than people for whom glory and personal achievement are something that it is hard to relinquish. Perhaps this is because the transformation has already begun in those who are intellectually limited.

The idea that the experience of disability can have transforming effects is not just confined to those within the L'Arche family, however. A study by Scorgie and Sobsey looks at the way disability can lead to positive outcomes as well as negative ones.<sup>480</sup> Their study showed that most parents of children with disabilities found the experience a positive one, with changes that included personal growth, improvement to relationships and changes in their philosophical or spiritual values. The researchers also refer to Victor Frankl's work on the discovery of meaning through tragic events.<sup>481</sup> Traumatic events can force people to adopt different strategies to cope and the term 'transformational events' was used to encapsulate the idea that positive change can be brought about as a result of trauma. They also cite the example of Gene Stallings, who became a better football coach because of his son with Down's syndrome.<sup>482</sup> They express the hope that more will be done to see how to help parents to develop such transformational beliefs and to encourage professionals not to catastrophise disability.<sup>483</sup>

Another researcher who has gained insights as a result of having a son with a serious disability is Frances Young. She turns to Gregory of Nyssa<sup>484</sup> who revealed that 'mutability

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<sup>479</sup> *Community and Growth*. p. 29.

<sup>480</sup> K. Scorgie and D. Sobsey, "Transformational Outcomes Associated with Parenting Children Who Have Disabilities," *Mental retardation* 38, no. 3 (2000).

<sup>481</sup> V.E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Pocket, 1985).

<sup>482</sup> G. Stallings and S. Cook, *Another Season: A Coach's Story of Raising an Exceptional Son* (Broadway Books, 1997).

<sup>483</sup> Examples of statements made by parents interviewed in this study include the following: 'It's taught me that there are no meaningless persons; there are no throw away people. Everyone has something to offer.' And from another person, 'Another important change for me is the growing affinity I feel for the most powerless and most vulnerable in society; [my] sense of social justice is heightened.' Scorgie and Sobsey, "Transformational Outcomes Associated with Parenting Children Who Have Disabilities." p. 203.

<sup>484</sup> 'For Nyssen, mutability is a means to redemption.' Susan R. Holman, "Healing the Social Leper in Gregory of Nyssa's and Gregory of Nazianzus's "Περὶ Φυλοπτοχίας", " *The Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 3 (1999). According to Holman, Gregory of Nyssa did not believe that Leprosy was contagious, and he encouraged his audience to interact with lepers so that they would acquire some of the holiness which leprosy sufferers were presumed to have achieved through their sufferings.

was the condition of advance towards Godlikeness, rather than the cause of a disastrous fall from perfection. To put it in our terms, impairment and limitation are required if humanity is to have potential, to be stretched towards ever higher goals.<sup>485</sup> Young then links her comments to L'Arche by saying that it is 'a place where the kingdom is anticipated, and so its true nature is revealed.'<sup>486</sup> She also says that such communities 'will bear in their bodies the brokenness of Christ's body.'<sup>487</sup>

Writing as the mother of a girl with cerebral palsy, Sara Green talks about the need to create a new narrative, along with dealing with the loss of the imagined future she had for her child. Her first sentence sets the tone as she says that 'raising a child with a disability is a profoundly transformative experience.'<sup>488</sup> She then discusses various aspects of the loss (of an imagined future), the need to create a new future, and then discusses her own personal journey. 'The journey down this path has been a personally transforming experience for me in some surprising ways. It seems to have opened up some areas of my soul that would otherwise lie dormant.'<sup>489</sup> In the article she shares a series of poems that she says just came to her, insistently, even though writing poetry was not part of her background as an academic sociologist. She speaks very positively about mothering Amanda, which 'created in me a willingness to share my emotions with others in ways that I would have found uncomfortable in the past.'<sup>490</sup>

## 5. The experience and theology of realised eschatology

Henri Nouwen's reflections offer important insights into the theology and practice of L'Arche and his writings indicate that he supports the idea of realised eschatology. In *Life of the Beloved*, the book Nouwen intended as an introduction to faith for non-believers, he wrote that 'Eternal life is not some great surprise that comes unannounced at the end of our existence in time; it is, rather, the full revelation of what we have been and have lived all along.'<sup>491</sup> This suggests continuity and supports the idea that recognition will be possible in

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<sup>485</sup> Young, *Encounter with Mystery: Reflections on L'Arche and Living with Disability*. pp. 177-8.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid. p. 178.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid. p. 179.

<sup>488</sup> S.E. Green, "Mothering Amanda: Musings on the Experience of Raising a Child with Cerebral Palsy," *Journal of Loss & Trauma* 7, no. 1 (2002). p. 21.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>491</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (Alban Books Limited, 2002). p. 109. Although this book did not answer the questions of his agnostic friend, it was well-received by believers. In

heaven as well as providing a hint of realised eschatology. This can be understood as something which has already been lived being integrated with what is to come. Nouwen's writings from the time when he moved to the L'Arche community in Toronto in 1986 demonstrate how much he was influenced by the transformative power of disability. He describes the bodies of the disabled people living in L'Arche communities as 'the sacred ground of the resurrected life.'<sup>492</sup> There is this sense of heaven and earth being linked, in some mystical way, through these distorted bodies. In their caring for the weak and the poor the ordinary assistants become aware of the everyday miracles, leading them to greater faith in the resurrection because they have witnessed those tiny resurrections for themselves. I will now reconstruct Nouwen's ideas on realised eschatology by looking at his theology of care giving and his reflections on resurrection and the resurrected body.

### 5.1 Care giving

As mentioned in the introduction, one of Nouwen's tasks in the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto was to take care of Adam. Caregiving for Nouwen was more than simply a process of looking after those who are weak. The following passage, from an anthology of Nouwen's writing on caregiving,<sup>493</sup> sums up the ideas as they relate to eschatology.

We are called to a life eternal and, in the long run, caregiving can only be truly life-giving if it is seen and experienced in the service of eternal life. Caregiving is bringing people into touch with their most precious self, infinitely loved and cared for, and destined for a life over which death has no power. In this sense, caregiving is a preparation for eternal life.<sup>494</sup>

What this implies is continuity, so that what happens in this life is related to the next. This is saying more than simply giving advice to do good deeds in this life so that we will be rewarded in the next. By caring we are giving a deep message of worth and belovedness, feelings that mirror the love of God.

Another aspect of caregiving can be seen in the way bereavement support is given. Nouwen believed that the death of someone we care about can be seen as their gift to us. To appreciate this notion it is necessary to understand Nouwen's belief in the Communion of the Saints.

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it he spells out the themes of Taken, Blessed, Broken and Given, themes which formed a basis for many of his talks, including the ones broadcast by the Crystal Cathedral Ministries.

<sup>492</sup> H. Nouwen, "The Most Profound Basis for the Sacredness of All Human Flesh," *New Oxford Review* 54, no. 2 (1987). p. 17.

<sup>493</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Caregiving: The Henri Nouwen Spirituality Series* (Upper Room Books, 2011).

<sup>494</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

This is the idea that the community here on earth is linked in some mystical way to those who have died. Nouwen became particularly drawn to those who were suffering from AIDS and ministered to their needs when he could. Not long before he took his sabbatical in 1995, he spoke at a conference in Chicago organised by the National Catholic AIDS Network on the subject of Befriending Death. In this talk he commended the idea of the Communion of the Saints, trying to recover what seems to have been lost in recent times of the practice of praying for and to the saints who have gone before us.

I hope that somehow you and I can rediscover that hundreds of people hold us. Your body, sick or weak, is connected with bodies of people all over the world. You are held safe, not just by a god, but by a god who creates a people. You are a part of that people that travels from Egypt and the new land. You are part of the people that travels through the boundaries of life, part of the people that somehow belongs together, and you claim a communion with them.<sup>495</sup>

Here Nouwen is reaching out to a marginalised community, giving them not only hope of a new life in the promised land, but also helping them to cope with the loss of the ones who have gone before. This idea that those who have died can be a blessing to those who are left behind was made even more clearly in a funeral eulogy where Nouwen said that death is not the end of the relationship since instead ‘death opens up for us an always deeper understanding of the power of love.’<sup>496</sup> He goes on to link this to the death and resurrection of Jesus, saying that it was only after Jesus died that the disciples were able to see who Jesus is and to understand the part he had played in their lives. The loss of a loved-one, he explains, can be a catalyst for closer union with God, as this extract from that funeral homily explains:

This is not the end, this is the beginning. And a beginning not only because we will all be brought together again in the house of our Father but also because already now there is a new beginning for us. He who lived with us so intimately will now guide us in a new way, will help us to discover more deeply the meaning of our lives, will challenge us to experience more fully what it means to be human and will taste more deeply the power of love.<sup>497</sup>

There is a hint here of realised eschatology when he says ‘already now there is a new beginning for us.’ Such words are so much more than the usual platitudes of ‘he’s gone to a

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<sup>495</sup> M. O’Rourke, *Befriending Death: Henri Nouwen and a Spirituality of Dying* (Orbis Books, 2009). pp. 94-95. Michelle O’Rourke is quoting from the transcript of a talk Nouwen gave at the National Catholic AIDS Network, Chicago, Illinois, 1995.

<sup>496</sup> Nouwen’s Unpublished Homily for the funeral of Alex Frascati, consulted in the Henri Nouwen Archives, John Kelly Library, St Michael’s College, Toronto. 1.1.2, File# 159-1, Item #159-1 12, box 37.

<sup>497</sup> Nouwen’s Homily for the funeral of Alex Frascati.



better place and we will all meet again one day.’ This is so much more than a promise for the future but it is an assurance about here and now. That same idea can be found in Vanier’s eulogy at Nouwen’s funeral in Holland.

Healing and reconciliation are happening in the open space that Nouwen has left behind. The open space of a prophetic vision where we are not only Christians but others who are searching truth, searching love, searching a real spirituality, a spirituality that will flow from the broken hearts of people, not through power but through the wounded hearts of people. So we must fill this empty space.<sup>498</sup>

The answer to the question of how they could do this is that they will be able to live on by supporting each other, living the resurrected life of Nouwen, remembering the things he taught them, just as the disciples lived on after Jesus had ascended to heaven, by remembering the things he had taught.<sup>499</sup>

Nouwen argues, in *Our Greatest Gift*, that as people come closer to death, they come closer to God and that it is therefore a privilege to care for the dying. More than this, it is allowing those who are dying to fulfil their vocation as sons and daughters of God. The care that is given to people when they are dying is a way of reminding them that they are loved, they are not alone. Caring for the dying is hard to do alone, and that is why people need to work as a team. ‘Caring together is the basis of community life,’ says Nouwen, indicating that this shared activity of caring supports the community as the community supports the person who is dying. There is a reciprocity of benefit here. This is something which has been remarked upon by others, that as the community cares for the weakest member, the community becomes united. ‘It is essential to the weakest members of our community that those who care for them do so together. They say to us: ‘For me to live, you must love, not just me, but each other too.’<sup>500</sup>

Often it is the least able, the most dependent person, who is able to strengthen others by encouraging all the members of the community to work together to overcome all the barriers which his or her condition causes. The paradox here is that the weakest has become the means of strength for all. Because of that one of the gifts of caregiving is that it can lead to a

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<sup>498</sup> Vanier, J. Funeral Eulogy for Henri Nouwen, consulted in the Henri Nouwen Archives.

<sup>499</sup> Nouwen expressed similar ideas in his eulogy for his secretary, Connie. In the introduction he said that God will do a miracle by ‘bringing her home – completely healed.’ He then unpacks what home is and what healing is. ‘Healing from paralysis and cancer, the final healing of being freed from her broken body and being made whole in the love of God.’ Homily accessed at Henri Nouwen Archives, 1.1.2, File #205, Box 38.

<sup>500</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*(HarperCollins, 2009). p. 77.

closer awareness of God, which some might describe as a vision of God. Nouwen explains it thus:

Caregiving is, finally, receiving God's blessing from those to whom we give care. What is the blessing? It is a glimpse of the face of God. Seeing God is what heaven is all about! We can see God in the face of Jesus, and we can see the face of Jesus in all those who need our care.<sup>501</sup>

When he writes that 'seeing God is what heaven is all about' he is addressing the same issue as Augustine when he discussed the vision of God.<sup>502</sup>

## 5.2 Resurrection and the resurrected body

During Eastertide Nouwen's *Sabbatical Journey* reflections naturally turn to the resurrection.

Nouwen comments that 'while many question whether the resurrection really took place, I wonder if it doesn't take place every day if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear.'<sup>503</sup>

The time Nouwen spent with Adam was a very grace-filled time for him. Nouwen allowed Adam to change him, to reveal to him what he calls 'the inner voice of love', a phrase he used as the title for a book. Nouwen describes those hours he spent with Adam, getting him up in the morning, as 'a time of contemplation, during which we, together, were touching something of God. With Adam I knew a sacred presence and I 'saw' the face of God.'<sup>504</sup>

This links to the idea of seeing the face of God in Augustine's work on vision. If we can see what heaven is about in the faces of those who need our care, then we can imagine how heaven will be for those who have some kind of impairment, or disability, here on earth. The moments when our divine spectacles enable us to see clearly the presence of God in the world, these give us glimpses of heaven.

The process of seeing the face of God and gaining glimpses of heaven is not something that can be analysed precisely. It is something which requires a shift in thinking, in some cases. Nouwen explains how he needed to progress from asking one kind of question, such as 'can a person with profound learning disability appreciate who God is?' to asking a different question entirely. He talked about such questions as coming from below, meaning that they come from our own needs and ignorance. Instead he began to realise that the important questions come from above, from God. These are questions like 'Can you let Adam lead you

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<sup>501</sup> *A Spirituality of Caregiving: The Henri Nouwen Spirituality Series*. p. 66.

<sup>502</sup> See Augustine chapter and Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2. Vol. 2 Ch. 12.

<sup>503</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. p. 145.

<sup>504</sup> Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved*. p. 41.

into prayer? [...] Can you see my face in the face of Adam?’<sup>505</sup> In time Nouwen came to see God in Adam, to realise that the love of God was more important than anything else and that being is more important than doing.

As part of the grieving process Nouwen encouraged people to tell stories about Adam after his death. Yvonne remembers being able to imagine Adam in heaven talking to her and being young and energetic while Elisabeth describes Adam as ‘running and dancing, jumping up and down, free as a bird.’<sup>506</sup> Nouwen was not quite so confident, since he felt weighed down by his grief at the loss of his friend. He did, however, write about Adam as a peacemaker, who was now free from captivity, where he had been such a blessing to others, and ‘now he could receive the reward of his remarkable mission, a new body full of light, full of love, full of glory.’<sup>507</sup> The themes of light, love and glory seem to be not too far away from Augustine’s third level of vision, and from the idea of seeing God face to face. It was some while after Adam’s death that Nouwen began to feel an awareness of how that death could be the seed of eternal life, saying ‘When I saw his youthful body in the coffin I had a glimpse of this new life.’<sup>508</sup> He goes on to explain that the resurrection is not only something to hope for in the future but ‘something that is already happening in the midst of our grief.’<sup>509</sup>

Although Nouwen did not use the term ‘realised eschatology’ he did use the kind of language that indicates it was part of his belief system. That he continued to maintain this realised eschatology can be seen in the journal he wrote in his final year. ‘As we claim our faith in the resurrection of the body, we come to see that the resurrection is not simply an event after death but a reality of everyday life.’<sup>510</sup> Nouwen identifies three features of the resurrected life, features he calls unity, intimacy and integrity. By unity he means that in the resurrection there will be no divisions between people caused by nationality, creed, or mental capacity. By intimacy he means ‘a spiritual intimacy that involves body, mind and heart’<sup>511</sup> and one where all our humanity is integrated and whole. This description suggests that in the resurrected life we will have overcome problems such as those caused by separation and self-centredness.

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

<sup>507</sup> On page 12 of draft of *Adam, God’s Beloved*, relating to Wed 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. This passage was not kept in the final publication. Manuscript accessed in Henri Nouwen Archives. 1.1.1.39. File#80, Box 25.

<sup>508</sup> Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God’s Beloved*. p. 107.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

<sup>510</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. p. 142.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

As a result of his experiences with Adam, Nouwen developed a new 'theology of the body', since caring for Adam's bodily needs brought Nouwen closer to his own body. Nouwen felt he had become detached from his body because he worked in an academic world, full of words. Adam reminded him that bodily resurrection was going to be essential to maintain the integrity of the human person. He draws a very clear conclusion from the empty tomb, since 'If the resurrection is only a spiritual event, as the Gnostic writers see it, why then did the women find the grave empty? It was clear that his body was no longer there.'<sup>512</sup> This absence of the body in the Gospel accounts was a sure sign, for Nouwen, of the truth of the resurrection, as an event that had really happened. This is an illustration of why Nouwen described Adam as his most important teacher of theology.

The question of what resurrected bodies would be like is addressed here, where Nouwen makes a clear statement of his belief that identity would be maintained in the eschaton.

We will be as unique in the resurrection as we are in our mortal bodies, because God, who loves each of us in our individuality, will give us bodies in which our most unique relationship with God will gloriously shine.<sup>513</sup>

This indicates how Nouwen believes that our individual identity will be present in the eschaton. It conveys the idea that the immortal, resurrected bodies, will exhibit the presence of God in those bodies, something which we are also encouraged to be aware of in those around us on earth. The same ideas about spiritual bodies which Augustine debated is mentioned by Nouwen when he says that 'Our spiritual bodies are Christ-like bodies.'<sup>514</sup> There is also the idea here of something that will be more visible, more radiant, than our earthly bodies reveal. Could it be perhaps that our resurrected bodies will be transfigured in the same way that Christ's body was transfigured on Mount Tabor?<sup>515</sup>

Transfiguration, however, is not the same as cure and Nouwen explains that there are clear differences between being healed and being cured. He points out that no-one in L'Arche becomes cured of whatever disability afflicted them when they come to live in the community. What does happen, however, is that they are healed and their presence is healing for others. The core members are at the centre of the community, and that is healing for them, especially in the case of those who have been marginalised because of their disabilities. As

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<sup>512</sup> Nouwen, "The Most Profound Basis for the Sacredness of All Human Flesh." p. 16.

<sup>513</sup> Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. p. 368. [Nov 28<sup>th</sup>.]

<sup>514</sup> Ibid. p. 370.

<sup>515</sup> Matt 17:2, Mark 9:2.

Nouwen says, 'handicaps won't vanish, but in L'Arche they can be lived as the hiding places of very precious gifts for our world.'<sup>516</sup> When he says that 'handicaps won't vanish' this indicates Nouwen's view of the eschaton, as well. Could this be the answer to the 'how will you know me?' question? That she will still be handicapped, her cognitive impairment will remain, but she will be seen by everyone as someone who holds a precious gift. 'When Jesus showed his pierced hands, feet and side to his disciples, they saw suffering as well as glory, the cross as well as the resurrection, pain as well as healing.'<sup>517</sup> This has come across before and it reminds us that the wounds of Christ are an essential clue to us about the presence of disabilities in the eschaton.

Nouwen explains that although he would be overjoyed if Adam were able to speak, or walk, or recognise people, he does not feel this is essential. So Nouwen would not expect Adam, even in heaven, necessarily to be able to do those things. 'Where he is most poor, there God dwells; where he is most silent, there God speaks; where he is most empty, there I find the signs of the resurrection.'<sup>518</sup> After Adam's death Nouwen goes to the Daybreak community and celebrates the Eucharist.

I chose to speak about the resurrection of Lazarus. Somehow our faith in the resurrection of the body is very important at this time. Adam's body, which we all had touched and held so often in his long struggle for survival, will be renewed. In the resurrection he will be dressed with a body that will allow him to express the deepest stirrings of his heart. We are full of tears as Mary, Martha, and Jesus were at the death of their brother and friend, but it is not the end. It is the passage to glory, to victory, to freedom.<sup>519</sup>

This passage is Nouwen's best description of the resurrection. The date of Adam's death was February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1996, the same year that Nouwen himself would die. At the time of Adam's death Nouwen had already completed the book of meditations for every day of the year, *Bread for the Journey*. Here is the entry for 6<sup>th</sup> December, which was probably written around November 1995.

There is no "after" after death. Words like after and before belong to our mortal life, our life in time and space. Death frees us from the boundaries of chronology and brings us into God's "time," which is timeless. Speculations about the afterlife,

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<sup>516</sup> Nouwen, "Home, Healing and Hope." p. 4.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>518</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen and S.S.J. John Dear, *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*(Orbis Books, 2002). p. 164.

<sup>519</sup> Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. p. 105.

therefore, are little more than that: speculations. Beyond death there is no “first” and “later,” no “here” and “there,” no “past,” “present,” or “future.” God is all in all.<sup>520</sup>

This assertion, that the resurrection of the body is an event which will happen outside of our human understanding of time, leads to a requirement for trust, rather than useless questioning, for there are many questions which cannot be answered.

The Resurrection is God’s way of revealing to us that nothing that belongs to God will ever go to waste. What belongs to God will never get lost, not even our mortal bodies! The Resurrection, therefore, doesn’t answer any of our curious questions about life after death, such as, ‘How will it be? How will it look?’ It does, however, reveal to us that, indeed, love is stronger than death. After that revelation we have to remain silent and leave the ‘whys, wheres, hows and whens’ behind .... and simply trust.<sup>521</sup>

Here it seems that Nouwen is not speculating about heaven, but advising us to focus on love and trust. There is no need to be concerned because nothing will be wasted. What we do now is sow ‘seeds of eternity’ as this section illustrates:

Our short lives on earth are sowing times. If there were no resurrection of the dead, everything we live on earth would come to nothing. [...] This wonderful knowledge that nothing we live in our bodies is lived in vain holds a call for us to live every moment as a seed of eternity.<sup>522</sup>

This passage seems to say that all the love we have had for everyone we have ever loved is a seed which will grow in eternity. That love will not be wasted. That love is valuable, worthwhile, even when the people we have loved have gone, even when we no longer see them, even when, in the eyes of the world, that love was a waste of time. Nothing is ever wasted. It will all bear fruit and we can be glad to have loved and thankful for those who allowed us to love them. Nouwen comments in his journal on how a moment of insight struck him when he read 1 Cor 15:35-38 and that this gave him the inspiration to write this specific section of *Bread for the Journey*.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. p. 378. [Dec 6<sup>th</sup>.]

<sup>521</sup> *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. pp. 116-7.

<sup>522</sup> *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. p. 369. [Nov 29<sup>th</sup>.]

<sup>523</sup> *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. The entry for November 28 contains this: ‘Last night I got stuck in my writing. I was trying to reflect on the resurrection of Jesus and on our resurrection. I reflected myself into a corner. [...] Then I saw that Paul raises my very question when he asks rhetorically, “How are dead people raised, and what sort of body do they have?” He answers with unwavering conviction.’ [He quotes the passage from 1 Cor 15] ‘This answer really woke me up! It was as if I heard it for the very first time. Our life is a seed that has to die to be dressed with immortality!’

Seeds also feature when it comes to the resurrection of the body, where it was Adam's body that taught Nouwen some important lessons. Taking his inspiration from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15: 35-38) Nouwen declares that 'Adam's unique body is the seed of his resurrected life.'<sup>524</sup> By this he means that the fact that Adam's body was wounded, bore scars, meant that he was able to be a sign, just as the scarred body of Jesus was a sign, of resurrection. Nouwen says that he saw signs of the resurrection when he saw Adam's body in the coffin, because after death his body looked so young and fresh. Nouwen was convinced that Adam's resurrected body would look like that, and yet still be recognisable as Adam. We can connect this with Nouwen's understanding of the risen Christ. He affirms that the resurrected Jesus as he appears in the Gospels has scars and wounds. He asserts that 'the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the Christian attitude toward the human body.'<sup>525</sup> Nouwen, like Augustine, considers that the wounds on Christ's resurrected body are an indication that scars will perhaps remain as signs of our earthly life in our resurrected bodies. In a passage from the *Road to Daybreak* Nouwen describes the Easter Sunday morning Eucharist which he celebrated with a few people that year in Trosly. He quotes one of the people there as saying: 'It is such a comfort to know that Jesus' wounds remain visible in his risen body. Our wounds are not taken away, but become sources of hope to others.'<sup>526</sup>

Whereas some might long for the resurrected Jesus to be perfect, free from all scars and blemishes, instead there is an acknowledgement of the blessings the scars bring, since they affirm those who have disfigured bodies. Nouwen is also speaking of scars when he says that

The resurrection of the body means that what we have lived in the body will not go to waste but will be lifted in our eternal life with God. As Christ bears the marks of his suffering in his risen body, our bodies in the resurrection will bear the marks of our suffering. Our wounds will become signs of glory in the resurrection.<sup>527</sup>

The message here is clearly that wounds and scars are positive things, 'sources of hope' and 'signs of glory' are the phrases he uses. This is reminiscent of what Augustine says about the scars of the martyrs when he says 'the beauty of their valour will shine out'<sup>528</sup> as both Augustine and Nouwen are indicating that they believe scars will be transformed in the eschaton.

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<sup>524</sup> Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved*. p. 107.

<sup>525</sup> Nouwen, "The Most Profound Basis for the Sacredness of All Human Flesh." p. 17.

<sup>526</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*(Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997). p. 163. The person being quoted is Sue Hall.

<sup>527</sup> *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. p. 366. [November 26<sup>th</sup>.]

<sup>528</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.19 p. 1062.

In *The Road to Peace* Nouwen explains how the disciples realise who Jesus is during those post-resurrection encounters.

This knowing is much more than a simple recognition of a familiar person. It is a rediscovering of a long intimate relationship that has grown during years of listening, speaking, eating, and sharing the joys and pains of everyday life. Those who recognised Jesus were the ones who had lived with him and their recognition brought them in touch with that intimate, all-embracing love that had reshaped their lives in the most radical way. Knowing him again meant loving him again with a love that pervaded every fibre of their being. [...] Only those who loved him in his brokenness love him in his glory.<sup>529</sup>

This is the key to the answer to the ‘how will you know me?’ question. The parents will know their daughter even better than they knew her on earth. They will recognise their beloved daughter because they knew her in her brokenness on earth. They will know her even more, because they will recognise all the love she had for them, all the ways in which, perhaps, due to her disability, she was not able to express always. And they will rediscover all the intimacy of a relationship of love between them, her parents, and this beautiful girl who has asked such a profound theological question, which never fails to impress people when they hear about the theme of this research.

### Conclusion: Jean Vanier’s eschatology

Having explored ideas on personal identity, considered the treasure that is hidden in the void, examined the debate about the place of suffering and discussed the concept of transformation, it is now time to turn to the question of what Jean Vanier’s eschatology would comprise. What does he think the eschaton will be like for L’Arche core members? This is not an easy question to answer, however, for reasons which we will now consider.

One of the limitations of Vanier’s approach is that his claims are rather vague and lacking in a substantial theological basis. He repeats themes, such as going down the ladder, and the cry of the poor, but these are not developed into an overarching theology or philosophy which can be compared with that of Augustine, for example. The power of vulnerability and weakness, for example, is contestable as weakness can be frustrating and a source of anxiety and anguish. By offering a simple formula, a rule such as ‘go down the ladder’ or ‘listen to the poor’ Vanier does not support this with a deeper rationale, or a more profound analysis to

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<sup>529</sup> Nouwen and John Dear, *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*. p. 166.



engage with an academic audience. Very few journal articles have been written about L'Arche, and those that have are generally focused on practical care issues, rather than philosophical debate. Vanier himself has chosen to stay away from academia and has not published academic papers since his doctoral thesis. This has limited the scope of his audience to those working in the field of the care of people with learning disabilities and meant that his ideas are not as widely known as they might have been.

Another difficulty with Vanier is that he can sometimes appear to be painting a rosy picture of life with people with disabilities, and seems a little critical of parents when they do not appreciate the blessings that their children bring.<sup>530</sup> The reality of living with a severely disabled child is very hard. Many marriages break up when a disabled child places enormous strains on the relationship of the parents. Although the Faith and Light<sup>531</sup> movement aims to help support such families, the fact remains that for many people the opportunity to have their learning-disabled child cared for in a L'Arche community is an impossible goal to aim for. Ian Brown claims, for example, that the waiting list for a place in a L'Arche community is twenty years.<sup>532</sup>

When arguing that we are all vulnerable Vanier does not seem to consider the different degrees of vulnerability and the consequences of these. If everyone were to be as vulnerable as the most limited L'Arche core members then who would care for them? Some acknowledgement of the different degrees of vulnerability needs to be made. For every core member there needs to be a whole team of people to support them. That team consists of those who are admittedly vulnerable and dependent on each other, but nevertheless they are a lot less vulnerable than the person for whom they are caring. The observation made by Carel is that there is an asymmetry of the relationship when one person is very visibly disabled (she gives the example of needing to carry oxygen around with her) and the other is not. The non-disabled person immediately knows a lot more about the disabled person than they do about her. The relationship is not one of equals.

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<sup>530</sup> An example of Vanier speaking in general terms about the harm that parents can do to their children if they do not love them enough is to be found in a chapter on 'Belonging'. 'As a child discovers at certain moments her parents' lack of love, their need to control or possess, and sometimes their violence and abuse, she discovers through her inner feelings of depression, anger, and revolt that belonging is a difficult, even dangerous, reality.' Vanier, *Becoming Human*. pp. 41-42.

<sup>531</sup> Faith and Light is a branch of L'Arche which provides a support network for families of people with learning disabilities who are living at home with their families.

<sup>532</sup> I. Brown, *The Boy in the Moon: A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son* (St. Martin's Press, 2012). p.187.

Vanier is from the Catholic tradition and although L'Arche is inclusive in admitting those of all faiths, there is still an emphasis on the Christian approach to suffering. It can be argued, therefore, that his approach lacks pluralism.

Some people have joked that Henri Nouwen did not write 34 books, but wrote one book 34 times and in some ways that criticism could also be applied to Vanier. He does seem to return to the same themes over and over again and some find his books repetitive. This repetition makes his writing seem unstructured and difficult to systematise. There is a comfort in reminding people of what they already know, but nevertheless it would be good to be surprised by something new occasionally.

Although Vanier does not often speak directly about the eschaton, there is one eschatological statement, in a passage from his book about the Gospel of John, which clearly indicates his understanding that heaven will be a place of transformation, a place where oneness with God can be achieved.

The final victory, which for Jesus is the resurrection, is for the friends of Jesus a transformation in God where they will *know* the Father as the Son knows the Father, where they will *be with* the Father as the Son *is with* the Father, where they will be able to say, "I and Jesus are one," as Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."<sup>533</sup>

This concept of being one, this idea of unity with the Father, refers here to the disciples of Jesus after the resurrection, but might also be extended to the future eschaton for all of humanity. Vanier moves on to talk more generally about the future for everyone when he says it will be where 'we will live the *final birthing* that Jesus refers to here, a birthing in the heart of the Trinity. This will be at the time of our death when all of us are set in God.'<sup>534</sup> Although he italicises 'final birthing' it is the phrase 'set in God' which resonates clearly the idea of unity with God, confirming the idea of 'oneness,' previously mentioned.<sup>535</sup> Two more eschatological ideas follow, when Vanier talks about the farewell discourse Jesus makes to his disciples.

In love each one is unique and precious; each one has his or her place; each one receives and each one gives; each one has a grateful heart. There are no more barriers;

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<sup>533</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 285.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid. p. 287.

<sup>535</sup> In an address to the priests of the Diocese of Westminster John McDade, SJ comments that 'You know the expression from Star Trek that 'we are in deep space'; surely we can say analogously that we are in 'deep God': this is what a doctrine of the Trinity is meant to support.' John McDade, "Judgement and Purgatory," Talk, (2010), [http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20111031\\_1.htm](http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20111031_1.htm). p. 5. This concept of 'deep God' is one which can also be used to illustrate the same ideas of Vanier of 'birthing in the heart of the Trinity.'

each one delights in the other, each is a delight for the other because in each one is seen the face of God.<sup>536</sup>

This idea of seeing God in each other is developed later when he says that ‘together we reflect the infinite beauty of God, the unity in God.’<sup>537</sup> This is the eschatological vision of Vanier, a place where each person is part of God, united with God, reflecting the glory of God to each other.

The eschatology of Jean Vanier is, like the treasure which is hidden in the void, something which is not always easy to identify. Because his work is with the individuals of L’Arche, meeting them in the everyday events of their lives, he does not write extensively about the world to come. His themes are those of love and the heart, of suffering and sacrifice. His advice to move down the ladder to be with the poor and vulnerable does not appear to offer a path to heaven. Instead it offers a path to holiness, a way to grow close to Jesus, and that is his way to heaven. On this way our companions are those who are cognitively limited, yet infinitely talented when it comes to matters of the heart. If we walk alongside these L’Arche prophets we will reach our heavenly home with them, and join in the wedding feast to which all have been invited.

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<sup>536</sup> Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*. p. 299.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid. p. 299.

## Chapter 4      Seeing the riddle through the mirror<sup>538</sup>

This chapter attempts to answer the research question in the light of the findings developed in the previous chapters. The research question was: What does Christian belief in the resurrection of the body imply for people with disabilities, both physical and mental?

### The journey so far

This research began with an exploration of disability theories and approaches in order to provide a background from contemporary disability studies. This was followed by a consideration of the relevant views of three different interlocutors. The first of these was Augustine whose eschatology was explored through later chapters from his *City of God* and through his sermons, letters and other writings. The contemporary voices of Jean Vanier and Henri Nouwen provided a useful and practical contrast to Augustine. At this stage the research question will be re-visited to draw together these different voices. The research question is ultimately a question about human identity in the light of Christ's life and teaching; hence, I would like to answer the question posed by asking three further questions: 1. What does Jesus say about heaven and human identity? 2. What are the pillars of a theology of identity here on earth? 3. What can theology tell us about identity in the eschaton?

### 1. How did Jesus portray heaven?

Before Pilate Jesus says 'My kingdom is not of this world' (Jn 18:36). Jesus showed that our human destiny, and therefore our identity, lies beyond this world and points the way to that heavenly kingdom. Biblical accounts of the kingdom will be discussed here, together with a consideration of the importance of scars which form a physical reminder of past suffering.

#### 1.1 Heaven

All occurrences of the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' in the New Testament are in Matthew's gospel, where the phrase appears twenty-nine times. I have decided, for ease of reference, to divide these occurrences into three broad categories. The largest number of mentions of the kingdom of heaven relate to admittance or position in the kingdom. Examples of these

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<sup>538</sup> This is a paraphrase of Augustine, Sermon 262,29 where he says 'But when we see face to face what we now see through a mirror in a riddle...' Augustine et al., *Sermons (230-272b) on the Liturgical Seasons*(New City Press, 1993).

include the beatitude references, 'blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt 5:3) and the example of children being admitted, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' (Matt 18:3). In all there are twelve references to the kingdom of heaven which relate to membership.

The next most common mention, and one which is of greater interest perhaps in this context, are the kingdom parables of which there are ten, though some only consist of a single verse, such as 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.' (Matt 13:44.) Other occurrences are the parables which comprise a longer story to illustrate the kingdom, such as the parable of the weeds and the wheat<sup>539</sup> (Matt 13:24- 30, explained in 36-43) the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23-35), the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20: 1-16), the parable of the king's wedding banquet (Matt 22: 2-15) and the parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matt 25: 1-13).

The common denominator in these parables, and of the admittance references, is that God's justice is very different from human justice and that membership of the kingdom of heaven is unlike that of an earthly kingdom. For example, whereas on earth children are the least important, in heaven they are given pride of place. The overall message is summed up in the conclusion of the labourers in the vineyard parable, 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last.' (Matt 20:16) The implication here could be that people with disabilities, those who are 'last' on earth, will be given pride of place in heaven. Those who, because of their disabilities, were not able to contribute a full day's labour will be rewarded with the same payment given to those who laboured all day in the hot sun. However unfair this may seem in the earthly vineyard, it will be eminently fair in the heavenly one.

Those who try to argue against this kind of justice are warned that the future does not bode well for them. 'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.' (Matt 23:13) Christian communities who fail to recognise the value of those with disabilities might take note, and more will be said about the pastoral implications of this in Chapter 5.

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<sup>539</sup> For an interesting article which discusses this parable and its relevance for understanding the concept of the kingdom of God see Robert K. McIver, "The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43) and the Relationship between the Kingdom and the Church as Portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 4 (1995).

The biblical scholar Robert Foster asserts that Matthew ‘used this ‘heavenly’ speech to support his strategy of reaffirming the disciples of Jesus as the true chosen people of God.’<sup>540</sup> The concern here was to discourage those early followers of Christianity from reverting or converting to Judaism. It was important for Matthew to encourage the early Christians, who were regarded as heretics and outsiders by the Jewish community, and to reassure the Christian community that they were members of the family of God. Foster believes, therefore, that the kingdom parables were about making a clear contrast between the Pharisees, who would not be able to enter the Kingdom of God, and the disciples of Jesus who were following the right path to that kingdom. In this way ‘the language of heaven encourages the disciples to continue in their counter-cultural lifestyle as they are assured that the FH [Father in heaven] cares about their earthly struggles and needs and will give them a heavenly reward.’<sup>541</sup> This implies that the kingdom of God references in Matthew have a dual relevance, referring both to the present world and to the world to come. In order to be admitted to the heavenly kingdom Matthew’s audience were reminded that they belong to the earthly family of God who cares for them as his children.

Another exegetical scholar who considers the question of whether Matthew thought the kingdom of heaven was something that would happen in this world or the next is Margaret Pamment who says:

‘The kingdom of heaven’ is a place other than the world as it is known. Whether Matthew thought that it would be situated on a transformed earth or would be entirely transcendental is not clear since he does not speculate, but he makes it plain that the kingdom is transcendental in the sense that it is God who will establish it: it is a gift which God is about to give to those who are able to accept it. It is not a reality which man can bring about by his own efforts.’<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Robert Foster, "Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven’?: Matthew's Terminology Revisited," *New Testament Studies* 48, no. 04 (2002). p. 489.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid. p. 499.

<sup>542</sup> Margaret Pamment, "The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel," *ibid.* 27, no. 02 (1981). p. 214. Pamment also indicates that the situation in heaven will be the reverse of the situation on earth since ‘those whose lives are unfulfilled in this world will find fulfilment in the future.’ *ibid.* p. 213. In addition the need to show care towards others is emphasised in Matthew. ‘Those who had acted mercifully are invited to enter the kingdom.’ *ibid.* p. 216. Overall the kingdom parables, argues Pamment do three things; they describe the future kingdom, they defend the position of the Christians of the time and are an encouragement to faithfulness. In other words the parables are ‘eschatological, apologetic, hortatory.’ *Ibid.* *Ibid.* p. 223. Furthermore Pamment explains that the status of those in the kingdom will be unlike that which they enjoyed on earth. She says that ‘the way that leads to the kingdom of heaven involves humility, an abrogation of status and a willing acceptance of the role of servant and the suffering which such a role brings with it.’ *ibid.* p. 225.

This expresses the same idea as that of Rowan Williams, which will be discussed below, with regard to the gift of God which is not dependent on the efforts people make to deserve that gift. The gift of God might be refused, but that gift does not depend on human agency.

The overall message here is that Jesus wanted people to think not in terms of personal wealth, or overt sanctity, not according to status or achievements, but according to need. The poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the lowly, the marginalised, these are the people Jesus elevates to a sure and certain place in heaven. Jesus wanted people to look in unexpected places for those who would enjoy the King's banquet in heaven. Jesus recognised hidden potential, as with yeast and mustard seeds, where those who appeared to have little to recommend them were destined to achieve greatness in the future. All of this is congruent with the idea that people who suffer from disabilities in their earthly lives will be rewarded with treasure in heaven.

Here would be a useful place to interrogate our main interlocutor, Augustine, since he has given some useful examples of exegesis relating to the kingdom of heaven in his homilies. Augustine's discussion of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard includes the following:

... and in eternal life we shall all be equal. For while we shall sparkle in different ways according to our various desserts, some more, some less, as far as eternal life is concerned, it will be the same for all.<sup>543</sup>

*et in vita aeterna omnes aequales erunt. quamvis enim meritorum diversitate fulgebunt, alius magis, alius minus: quod tamen ad vitam aeternam pertinet, aequalis erit omnibus.*

He is explaining here that the payment the labourers received represents our heavenly reward of eternal life in the resurrection, and that this is the same for everyone, but he does allow for different degrees of 'sparkle' although the duration of eternal life is the same for everyone. Augustine interprets the parable as being about the rewards we will receive at the end of time, when those who have been dead for a very long time will be rewarded in exactly the same way as those who have only died recently. So he assures his congregation that they will have no disadvantage compared to the saints who died long before them.

The translator gives 'sparkle' as a translation of '*fulgebunt*' which can also mean shine, flash or be illustrious. The reference to 'desserts' is a translation of '*meritorum*' which means things we deserve to receive, as in the case of wages that have been earned. This would suggest that Augustine understood that, perhaps, we would not all be identical in heaven.

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<sup>543</sup> Augustine et al., *Sermons (51-94) on the New Testament*. Sermon 87.6, p 410.

Some people might shine more than others, which is a curious anomaly, although Augustine does not elaborate further, it does seem that he was not ruling out the possibility that heavenly rewards might vary from one person to another. It might seem strange that Augustine implies that the rewards of heaven might be variable, because we are so conscious, in our society, of the need for equality. The Gospel accounts do indicate different rewards, however, as in the case of the parable of the talents. (Matt 25: 14-30) There people receive different rewards having been given different gifts in the first place. Many people, however, especially if they are sufficiently humble, will simply be glad to have reached heaven at all, and not be concerned about any supposed inequality of reward.

In another sermon<sup>544</sup> Augustine explains the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins. (Matthew 25). The midnight hour when the bridegroom returns represents the last judgement, which will come at a time that we least expect. The virgins are all good Christian people, but some are wise and some are foolish, and Augustine explains that the difference between them is because of the oil which represents charity. Their oil flasks are their hearts, where the deepest charity resides. Augustine explains the difference between this inner oil and the outward signs of charity, when people do good works so that other people will notice them and praise them. This tells us that Augustine understood that not even good Christians would all be admitted into the heavenly kingdom if their hearts were found wanting in charity.

The overall conclusion is that the kingdom of heaven is a paradoxical place, where the expected orders that feature in the life on earth are left to one side and instead a new order is found. Those who are weak, vulnerable or in some ways second-class citizens, are likely to be in elevated positions. Earthly values are not always recognised. Certainly earthly wealth is of no importance. In this kingdom acts of charity that were performed on earth will be rewarded and something, like a mustard seed, which seems small and insignificant, will reveal its true worth.

## 1.2 Scars

Scars remain after a wound has healed and provide a link to the past.<sup>545</sup> There are several cities where a building which was partly destroyed has been left unrepaired as a reminder or a memorial to what has happened.<sup>546</sup> Thus scars allow us to anchor our feelings about

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid. Sermon 93.

<sup>545</sup> The lyrics of a song by Papa Roach include the line 'my scars remind me that the past is real' [http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/p/papa\\_roach/scars.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/p/papa_roach/scars.html) [accessed 13.11.13]

<sup>546</sup> Examples include Charles Church in Plymouth, St Luke's Church in Liverpool and Coventry Cathedral. 'Today the medieval ruins of Coventry Cathedral continue to remind us of our human capacity both to destroy



something unpleasant so that those memories are contained. People who have undergone traumatic experiences are encouraged to recall those experiences in order to be able to come to terms with their trauma.<sup>547</sup> This advice suggests that a reason why scars may be a feature of the eschaton is that they allow memory to engage with healing rather than repression of unpleasant events from our past.

It is interesting and remarkable to see that Jesus was portrayed as having scars in his post-resurrection appearances. The question of scars has already been considered in the Augustine chapter. The question relates to the appearance in heaven of someone who has some disability, some scar, in their earthly life. If they are in heaven, then surely they should be perfect, but can scars still appear, as badges of honour, to acknowledge the sufferings they endured in their earthly life? Perhaps being saved does not necessarily mean having no scars. Firstly the wounds of Jesus were visible. Secondly Augustine says that (for the same reason that Jesus' scars remained) the martyrs will still have their scars as signs of their martyrdom.<sup>548</sup> Those scars are no longer seen as defects, but instead they are the visible proof of how those martyrs have 'suffered for Christ's name'<sup>549</sup> because, Augustine argues, it is good for those marks to be there for all to see, in order to remind everyone of 'the beauty of their valour'<sup>550</sup>.

Discussion of the scars of the martyrs leads to the important question of how one might distinguish between features of our physiology which can be glorified and features which cannot. When Augustine was speaking specifically of the martyrs it would be clear how the signs of their martyrdom would make them candidates for glorification. In the case of ordinary people with ordinary scars, gained from accidents or congenital disabilities, would these potentially be able to be glorified? Does the soldier who loses a limb in battle deserve to have that scar glorified, because he was freely sacrificing his body on the battlefield? Does the person who is the victim of a terrorist bomb qualify for glorification, since they were an

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and to reach out to our enemies in friendship and reconciliation. In 2011, the ruins were designated as a memorial to all civilians killed, injured or traumatised by war and violent conflict world-wide.' From the website <http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/about-us/our-reconciliation-ministry.php> [accessed 13.11.13]

<sup>547</sup> The conclusions of a meta-analysis of treatments from PTSD recommended trauma-focused cognitive behaviour therapy as the most promising first-line treatment. Jonathan I Bisson et al., "Psychological Treatments for Chronic Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 190, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>548</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. 22.19 p. 1062. As I have quoted in the Augustine chapter. 'For in those wounds there will be no deformity, but only dignity, and the beauty of their valour will shine out, a beauty *in* the body and yet not *of* the body.'

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

innocent victim? What of the person who is injured through their own misadventure, such as someone who indulges in extreme sports, do they deserve to have their wounds glorified? And, more difficult than these examples, what of people with Down's Syndrome where the 'scar' is from an extra chromosome?

Clearly having scars does not mean lack of salvation. You can be saved and scarred. The healing Jesus performed was essentially a healing of the mind. He often said 'Go, your sins are forgiven'. He did not say 'go your scars have gone.' Augustine uses the example of the scars on the body of the risen Jesus being used to bring Thomas to faith and thus turning something negative into something positive. This is similar to the concept of a disability being used for a good purpose as, for example, when Jesus explains that the man blind from birth was blind so that the works of God may be revealed. 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.' (John 9:3)

An interesting example of glorified scars comes from Gregory of Nyssa, describing his experience when he arrives to find his sister Macrina on her deathbed. 'What I saw lying before me was really the remains of a holy martyr, who lay dead to sin, but shone with the grace of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>551</sup>

Later, when he realises that Macrina is about to die, he says that

It was as if an angel had assumed human shape in the household – an angel who had no relationship with the life of the flesh nor in any way adapted to it, and whose thought remained, in a perfectly natural way, in a state of impassibility, since the flesh did not attract her to her own feelings. For this reason, it seemed to me that she revealed to those around her that pure love for the unseen Bridegroom which she cherished, hidden in the secret places of her soul, and made public the inclination of her heart to hasten to him for whom she longed, so that, once freed from the fetters of her body, she might be with him as soon as possible.<sup>552</sup>

After Macrina's death he describes how the lady who assists him in laying out Macrina's body draws his attention to a small scar on her breast, telling him how it marked the place where she had suffered from a serious malignant growth from which she had been miraculously cured. The scar 'lasted until the end of her life, in order that it might be a reminder, as I see it, of a divine visitation, to form a source and a reason for unceasing

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<sup>551</sup> J.M. Petersen, *Handmaids of the Lord: Contemporary Descriptions of Feminine Asceticism in the First Six Christian Centuries*(Cistercian Publications, 1996). p. 66.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid. pp. 69-70.

thankfulness to God.<sup>553</sup> This gives a good reason why scars remain, so that they can be a reminder for the thankfulness that we owe to God.

Gregory also raises the same question about continuity of identity which this research is attempting to address. In a book written in the form of a dialogue between the teacher, Macrina, and her student, Gregory, the student remarks that our bodies are subject to all kinds of ailments and infirmities, particularly as we get older. Having described a variety of horrendous diseases that the human body can succumb to, he challenges his teacher to explain how the resurrection of the body can possibly be a good thing. Alternatively if we are not raised with the same body then we will not be the same person.

So if our bodies will be revived the same in all respects, what we expect is a misfortune; but if they will not be the same, the one who is being raised will be a different person from the one who was dead.<sup>554</sup>

Furthermore he asks how he would recognise himself if he is resurrected with a different body from his earthly one, saying that in this case, ‘it would be as if in the present life I had the image of someone in memory.’<sup>555</sup> He means that his own memory of what he looked like would challenge the new appearance if his resurrected body were not the same, but the body of a different person. He then continues in this way, using the imagery of human nature like a stream, an image which comes from Plato (Cratylus 402A) where Heraclitus says ‘You could not step twice into the same river.’<sup>556</sup>

Macrina, through the dialogue written by Gregory, replies to this firstly that there are some mysteries that cannot be explained in this life, and which we will not understand until after the resurrection, when ‘we will no longer need words to reveal what we hope for.’<sup>557</sup> She then goes on to say that the resurrection will restore us to what we were originally intended to be, that is before the fall.<sup>558</sup> She further explains that at the resurrection we will ‘put off that dead and ugly garment which was made for us from irrational skins’ and adds that the goal of God ‘when the whole fullness of our nature has been perfected in each man’<sup>559</sup> is something which ‘eye has not seen nor ear heard’. (1 Cor 2:8). She then explains that a process of healing will

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

<sup>554</sup> Nyssa, *The Soul and the Resurrection*. p. 109.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid. p. 110.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid. Fn. 17, p. 110.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid. p. 113.

<sup>558</sup> She later says that ‘all the blessedness which will spring up for us through the resurrection will bring us back to the grace of the beginning.’ Ibid. p. 119.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

take place to enable the sinful parts of our nature to be stripped away, and that the duration of this process would vary according to how serious our wrong deeds have been.

There is also an interesting section about the seed growing to maturity, and the changes which take place when a seed, which appears to have died and disintegrated into the earth, grows into a new mature plant. ‘Blessed are they for whom the perfect beauty of the ears rises immediately when they sprout in the resurrection.’<sup>560</sup> It would seem that Macrina does not answer Gregory’s question about identity, but does try to explain how very different the resurrected body might be from the seed from which it germinated.

Ben Quash comments on this story, suggesting that it illustrates how Christians should adopt different standards from those of the world around them with regard to beauty.

Christianity redefines beauty, so as to make room for ‘wounds’ (and, by extension, the marks of age and sacrifice and experience). It relates beauty to an idea of glory, which it believes Christ made visible even as he hung on the cross.<sup>561</sup>

This suggests that wounds are no barrier to perfection and that having wounds on a post-resurrection body would not present any difficulties, at least not for Gregory. An implication of this is that, by allowing our bodies, with all their scars and imperfections, to communicate the message of Christ, we allow ourselves to witness through worship, through caring acts we perform with our bodies, even through being seen as strange objects of curiosity because the world does not understand us.<sup>562</sup>

In heaven there can be a kind of new beginning, but without ignoring or forgetting what has gone before. ‘Redeemed human beings will carry with them the marks that show they have a history of sin, and only as such a history of forgiveness; a history of suffering, and only as such a history of healing. That history makes them who they truly are.’<sup>563</sup> This suggests that healing does not mean removal of all signs that suffering happened. What he is implying here is that those who have been wounded by disability of some kind will be recognisable as those who bear the scars of their disability. This does not, however, mean that they are less than perfect. The importance of wounds is that they ‘leave their marks as signs of a real history lived in a real and not a virtual world’<sup>564</sup>. The scar on Macrina’s body, however, does not

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid. p. 120. The ears are a continuation of the imagery of the seed growing into ears of wheat. Mention is also made of the wheat and the weeds parable. (See also p. 119).

<sup>561</sup> B. Quash, *Abiding: The Archbishop of Canterbury’s Lent Book* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012). pp. 182-183.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid. p. 189.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid. pp. 175-6

<sup>564</sup> Ibid. pp. 181-2

mean she is less than perfect since ‘The dead Macrina too will be radiant – genuinely beautiful – in her scarred holiness.’<sup>565</sup> And he goes on to say that when Gregory wrote a book about the Song of Songs,

The bride in the Song [...] becomes all at once like his dear sister – the bearer of a wound. This wound ruptures the enclosed human being and sets him in motion towards God, and away from a self-sufficient intactness that will be the inevitable victim of mortality. This is a God-directed openness that will be consummated in eternal life.<sup>566</sup>

So this is one answer to the question of recognition, because the wounds that afflicted someone in their earthly life will be recognisable from the scars they leave behind. What form those scars will take in the case of those wounded by intellectual impairment, psychological problems or other non-visible afflictions, is not possible to say. But just as the wounds of Christ were visible on his resurrected body, so our bodies will, in the eschaton, reflect the features of our lives that caused us pain and suffering. To deny those scars would be to remove the possibility of channelling their effects in a positive way. The scars need not be confined to physical ones, either. The mental challenges of living with a learning disability, for example, will also leave scars. Writing about his son, who has autism, Brian Brock says ‘I imagine that in heaven Adam and I will look back and have a good laugh at the struggles we have weathered together.’<sup>567</sup> Without the memory of those struggles something is missing from the father-son relationship. Without the scars, something would be missing from the identity of those who have been wounded. The question of identity is explored further in the next section.

## 2. A theology of identity

Theology says a lot about identity, especially by making statements about our status as embodied creatures in need of salvation. This section will attempt to answer a series of questions about identity. First there is an exploration of what it means to be a creature, to be created by God. The importance of relationships for identity is considered next. This is followed by a discussion of embodiment and its importance for identity. Finally some

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<sup>565</sup> Ibid. p. 183.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

<sup>567</sup> Brian Brock, "Autism, Care, and Christian Hope," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 13, no. 1 (2009). p. 23.

insights from the condition of Dementia are considered as they are revealing when we consider what it means to be human.

## 2.1 On Being Creatures

Being a creature means being dependent, something which is shared by all people, whether they are disabled or not. The Judeo-Christian world view argues that God created the world, and everything in it, so we are all God's creatures, all part of his created world. Theology has a lot to say about the status of being creatures, and here the two main interlocutors will be Irenaeus and Rowan Williams. Irenaeus was chosen because his ideas about the Garden of Eden, the Fall and the Resurrection of the dead provide a useful contrast to Augustine's later ideas on the Fall. Williams was chosen because of his ideas about free will and dependence, as well as his contribution to the topic of identity. The third step will include some reflection on "relationality" as a key implication of being creatures.

### 2.1.1 Irenaeus

Irenaeus argues the angels in heaven praise God (he uses the phrase 'giving homage to the Almighty God'<sup>568</sup>) not because God needs their praise, but to keep them out of mischief. The seven heavens are given names, from the highest to the lowest, starting with wisdom, followed by understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, godliness, and finally the one he calls 'this firmament of ours'<sup>569</sup>, saying that the seven heavens are represented by the seven-branched candlestick of Moses. The image of the creation, is of a place God had especially prepared for man, and then given to man, for man to have as his domain. The footnote here says that domain means 'the "place" assigned to man in the scheme of things'<sup>570</sup> rather than his ultimate home. Then it says that when God created man he was 'a child and had need to grow so as to come to his full perfection.'<sup>571</sup> The footnote (on p 150) suggests that 'full perfection' can also be translated as 'possibility' which would indicate that Irenaeus thought that the child had been created with the possibility of further development, further growth towards perfection.

The view of Irenaeus was that God created man to grow to perfection. Irenaeus describes Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as children, who are as yet undeveloped. This garden is a paradise, and as such gives them the best possible surroundings in order to flourish. There they walk with God, and in the divine presence they can learn and grow. In this way Irenaeus

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<sup>568</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J.P. Smith (Paulist Press, 1952). p. 53. (section 9)

<sup>569</sup> Ibid. p. 53. (section 9)

<sup>570</sup> Ibid. p. 149. Footnote 67.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid. p. 55. (section 12)

sees the creation story as a description of children who are growing towards maturity, thus in Genesis 1-3 we do not see a perfect couple who are later banished from their perfect world, but instead, a pair of young children who are growing, slowly and gradually towards perfection. That perfection is brought about by the new life in Christ which completes what began in Eden. Adam and Eve are innocent children, playing in the garden, unashamed of their nakedness, because children have no shame when they are naked. As Irenaeus says ‘their thoughts were innocent and childlike, and they had no conception or imagination of the sort that is engendered in the soul by evil, through concupiscence, and by lust.’<sup>572</sup> He paints this beautiful image when he writes ‘For this reason they *were not ashamed*, as they kissed each other and embraced with the innocence of childhood.’<sup>573</sup>

The image of children in the garden, learning as they grow into adulthood, also helps to resolve the tension between agency and dependence, outlined above. Just as parents are responsible for caring for their children, they are also able to allow them to learn, even to the extent of learning from their mistakes, and are willing to allow them another chance, over and over again if necessary, because they love them and want them to become mature adults. It might even be possible to imagine the exile from the Garden of Eden as a necessary process of growing up, allowing the children to go out and experience the world for themselves, away from the shelter of the family home.

This leads to an important difference between earth and heaven, though. In heaven the idea of learning from one's mistakes would have no meaning. Presumably we do not make mistakes in heaven. But overall it would seem that being a creature will be the same in heaven as it is on earth. Being a creature is a permanent, fixed feature of humanity. What would we be in heaven if we were not creatures? Even if we were angels, these are still creatures. The status of creatures is a characteristic of beings created by God. Even the fall does not change that. It is explained by a commentary on Irenaeus<sup>574</sup> that a question which exercised theologians over the years was whether the incarnation would have been necessary if the Fall had not occurred. Since Irenaeus talks of the Word walking in the Garden with Adam, would Christ have needed to be born as man if Adam had not been expelled from the Garden?

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid. p. 56. (section 14)

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. p. 56. (section 14)

<sup>574</sup> I.M. MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation* (Ashgate, 2002). p. 117.

There is a dichotomy here, in that Irenaeus seems to imply that a return to the original paradise garden would be returning to a state of lost innocence, where it would be possible to learn and make progress. Yet learning implies being less than perfect, which does not seem compatible with heavenly paradise. Perhaps the conflict is between stasis and movement, or between stasis and change, or even between perfection and lack of growth. In an ideal, perfect world can there be a place for change? This is a question which neither Irenaeus nor Augustine adequately answers.

It is in a different work that Irenaeus addresses the issue of the resurrection of the dead. He argues that it was more difficult for God to have created man from the dust of the earth in the first place than it will be to ‘reintegrate again that which has been created and then afterwards decomposed into earth’<sup>575</sup>. Irenaeus goes on to support his argument with examples from the ancients who lived for hundreds of years, the survival of the three young men in the fiery furnace and the ascent of Elijah in the fiery chariot to illustrate that with God all things are possible. (Luke 18:27).

Then he argues that just as Christ rose in body, so shall we, quoting 1 Cor 15:42. Later he uses examples from Isaiah and Ezekiel to support his argument about the resurrection. (Isaiah 26:19 and Ezekiel 37). Then he describes his ideas of the future, arguing that creation will be ‘restored to its primeval condition’<sup>576</sup>. It is good that Irenaeus says that eventually ‘there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain, always holding fresh converse with God.’<sup>577</sup> This implies that heaven will not be a static place. This seems to be relevant for this research question since we are then not seeking for a “fixed answer” but rather allowing for gradual evolution as the fullness of the Kingdom of God develops. This would mean there could be an active and dynamic sharing of people with different gifts, talents and abilities, and more will be said about this in Chapter 5 where we consider Pastoral implications.

### 2.1.2 Rowan Williams

In an influential lecture, ‘On Being Creatures’, the fourth Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture, given in 1989, Rowan Williams explains how the Judaeo-Christian account of creation seems to have originated around the time of the return from the Babylonian exile, a

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<sup>575</sup> A. Roberts, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325 Volume I - the Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*(Cosimo, Incorporated, 2007). (5.3.2) p. 529.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid. (5.32.1) p. 561.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid. (5.36.1) p. 567.



return which can be seen as a second Exodus. Thus Exodus itself comes to be seen as a reminder of the original creation story. What is important about this idea here is that during the exile, Egypt is seen as a place where there is no identity, since everyone is an anonymous slave. From out of this anonymity God calls a people, and calls them by name. This is a summons to participate with God in the work of creation and one consequence of this summons is the idea that identity is a created aspect of creatures. Williams explains, ‘Aquinas expressed with complete clarity what Isaiah’s words ultimately entail when he said that ‘creation’ simply points you to existing reality in relation to a creator.’<sup>578</sup> This leads to rejection of the idea that humans must struggle against their own natures, or that we must struggle against an all-powerful God. This also means, however, that we should not imagine ourselves as totally dependent upon God, because ‘if our relation to the creator is one of unconditional dependence, it looks as though both God and (rational) creatures are locked into a pattern which in the human context we should regard as diseased.’<sup>579</sup> This suggests that as creatures we are free creatures, not puppets, and therefore have responsibilities to share in the work of creation.

The acceptance of our freedom, our free will, is in opposition to our understanding of being dependent on our creator, God. We struggle to accept our dependence on God because we like to feel competent and capable and not in need of help from another. The solution to this struggle is to recognise our role as agents, our responsibilities towards others, although this is also not as simple as it sounds. Being creatures, and thus dependent on God is in tension with being agents, and thus having independence. Williams explains how this tension can be resolved:

[T]o imagine ourselves as agents by imagining ourselves as self-regulating individuals is to misconceive our fundamental need, which is for identity in relation, conversation, mutual recognition. We can imagine ourselves as self-regulating entities, but can only make sense of – let alone *value* or *love* – what is thus imagined by adopting the standpoint of another: by presupposing relation.<sup>580</sup>

There are two key ideas here. The first is where he indicates the purpose of identity is for relationships and the second is that this involves recognition. What follows from Williams is that relationships resulting from mutual recognition are important here on earth and it is

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<sup>578</sup> Williams, *On Christian Theology*. p. 68. This lecture was reprinted as Chapter 5 of *On Christian Theology*. The reference (not a direct quotation) to Aquinas is *De Potentia* III. 3.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

therefore reasonable to assume that they will also both be part of life in the eschaton. It also follows that our identity is a gift, given by the creator, and a gift that cannot be taken away. We do not construct our identity for ourselves, and this identity cannot be lost or removed from us. In heaven we will still be creatures with our God-given identity and this will enable us to interact with others who have their own identities.

Williams also discusses identity in an article entitled ‘Resurrection and Peace’<sup>581</sup> in which he offers his interpretation of the passage in Ephesians 2: 14-18, which is about the breaking down of enmity between Jews and Christians. Williams argues that this passage is about the establishment of the identity of the people of God and that the ideas here are often misinterpreted. He suggests that we do not receive our identity as a result of our own actions, adherence to the law, and so on, but instead our identity is given to us by God, the creator. We make the mistake of thinking ‘that human identity is for humans to *control*’ instead of accepting ‘the idea of a *belonging* that cannot be dictated or constructed by the human self (personal or social)’.<sup>582</sup> The implications for this are important for those with intellectual impairment, because their lack of ability to exercise particular thinking and reasoning skills will not have any detrimental effect on their identity. As Williams summarises, ‘resurrection is the transaction in human beings that brings about the sense of selfhood given not achieved’,<sup>583</sup> meaning that no matter how great or small our achievements are in this life, the resurrection does not depend in any way on those achievements. This is a significant matter which has pastoral implications as well, as for example when considering whether someone with learning difficulties is being prepared to receive the sacraments. This consequence will be considered in chapter 5, and the idea of identity is inextricably linked with relationships, the topic for the next section.

### 2.1.3 Relationships

An important aspect of the fact that we are creatures is that we are dependent beings. This dependence can be translated into the fact that we are relational beings. Relationships are important for God’s creatures, beings who were created in the image and likeness of God. God is relational, through the three persons of the Trinity. God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so Eve was created. For each person, their past consisted of relationships

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid. This article was first published as “Resurrection and Peace: More on New Testament Ethics,” *Theology*, November 1989 (pp. 481-90).

<sup>582</sup> Ibid. p. 269.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid. p. 271.

and so the future will also include relationships.<sup>584</sup> As Mary Jo Iozzio outlines, 'Relationships become the moral challenge of virtue and the defining *telos* toward which deliberate living aims.'<sup>585</sup> The actions of our earthly life are intricately woven from our relationships. Without those relationships there would be no aim to life, no purpose. Iozzio adds, drawing on Vanier, that 'it is in communities that we really become the human beings we can become.'<sup>586</sup> Similar ideas can be found in Vanier when he says that 'the desire in the heart of every human being is to find communion and tenderness, a feeling of loving and being loved through a physical presence.'<sup>587</sup> This all supports the belief that heaven will include relationships as well.

Iozzio explains further how 'the excellence of virtue is not limited to or restricted by notions of strength or intelligence quotient. Rather, from a consideration of disability, the excellence of virtue is located principally in the human reality of relationship.'<sup>588</sup> This very much supports the idea that physical attributes (strength) and mental capacities (intelligence) will not matter in the eschaton because they do not matter in relationships. How shallow would be a relationship if it were solely based on the strength or the intelligence of one or both parties. The entire message of Vanier is that relationships in L'Arche are as good as, if not better than, any other relationships. In addition to this, the most limited intellectually, the people with the greatest degree of impairment, are the people who experience the greatest peace in their hearts. As Vanier writes of the men and women who are the core members of the L'Arche communities

Free from the urge to compete and succeed, many of them radiate joy. They seem to have a greater wholeness than many people who are more intellectually or practically gifted. They show us a path of love, simplicity and joy.<sup>589</sup>

Thus the eschaton as a place of peace and joy is demonstrated in the lives on earth of those core members of L'Arche. As Alasdair MacIntyre points out, we are vulnerable and inter-

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<sup>584</sup> Similar ideas can be found in Kevin Corcoran, "Constitution, Resurrection and Relationality," in *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive Our Death?*, ed. G. Gasser (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010). Pages 191-205. Corcoran gives a philosophical view on relationality which is based on what he calls the Constitution View of human persons.

<sup>585</sup> M. J. Iozzio, "From a Consideration of Disability," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 3, no. 4 (2000). p. 48.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>587</sup> Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences*. p. 50.

<sup>588</sup> Iozzio, "From a Consideration of Disability." p. 49.

<sup>589</sup> Vanier, *Heart of L'Arche*. pp. 33-34.

dependent creatures who need to help each other and be helped by others in order to survive.<sup>590</sup> Similar ideas can be found in one of John Macmurray's 1954 Gifford Lectures.

We need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the others is the central and crucial fact of personal existence. Individual independence is an illusion; and the independent individual, the isolated self, is a nonentity. In ourselves we are nothing; and when we turn our eyes inward in search of ourselves we find a vacuum... It is only in relation to others that we exist as persons; we are invested with significance by others who have need of us; and we borrow our reality from those who care for us. We live and move and have our being not in ourselves but in one another.<sup>591</sup>

This represents an extreme view of relationality, since Macmurray does not allow for any individuality at all, a view which goes too far in the eyes of John Habgood<sup>592</sup> who cautions against accepting everything Macmurray says. Habgood points out that there is a danger that the individual is lost if we truly believe that alone we are nothing and that a balance needs to be maintained where we acknowledge our own individuality as part of the community. My judgement is that the idea that our reality is merely "borrowed" from others seems to deny us ownership of our own existence, something which is at the very least counter-intuitive. The other extreme, that we are all self-contained individuals, is also unacceptable, and the middle ground of interdependence and inter-relationality would seem to be more helpful. There is a mutuality of the human condition which might be expressed by some as 'we are all in this together' or, more poetically by John Donne as 'No man is an island',<sup>593</sup> and this accords with the practical reality of people who enjoy belonging to a valued community.<sup>594</sup> The idea that humans are relational is not a new one, of course, since Aristotle said, 'for no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone, since man is a political creature and one whose nature is to live with others.'<sup>595</sup> More recently Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum

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<sup>590</sup> In the first chapter of his book MacIntyre asks 'what difference to moral philosophy would it make, if we were to treat the facts of vulnerability and affliction and the related facts of dependence as central to the human condition?' A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*(Open Court, 2013). p. 4.

<sup>591</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*(London: Faber and Faber, 1961). p. 211.

<sup>592</sup> J.S. Habgood, *Being a Person: Where Faith and Science Meet*(Hodder & Stoughton Canada, 1998).

<sup>593</sup> J. Donne, *No Man Is an Island*(Souvenir Press Limited, 1988).

<sup>594</sup> Thomas Merton chose the memorable line from John Donne's poem as the title for his book of meditations *T. Merton, No Man Is an Island*(Shambhala, 2005). Augustine's view on community can be found in the Expositions on the Psalms where he calls the church the Tabernacle. See Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 33-50*. Psalms 26.6 and 41.9. Augustine knows that the way to union with God is through the church, the community of believers. He talks about enjoying *fellowship in God* and says that the life of the City is a social life. See *City of God*. 19.7 pp. 878-9. There is, however, something transient about a tabernacle, since it is like the tent in the desert that never finds a permanent home. In heaven the church will no longer be wandering in the wilderness.

<sup>595</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. L. Brown, trans. D. Ross(OUP Oxford, 2009). IX.9, p. 176.

have developed the capabilities approach to justice ‘that views human beings as held together by many altruistic ties as well as by ties of mutual advantage.’<sup>596</sup> This approach has many applications to people with disabilities and offers a useful account of how human dignity should be respected and upheld for all people, with and without disabilities.

## 2.2 Embodiment: Embodied Creatures

Humans are embodied beings. God becoming a human person as Jesus Christ, the mystery of the incarnation, makes a statement about the body. It will be useful here to approach the theological implications of embodiment by first considering a philosophical approach. The French philosopher Merleau-Ponty sees perception as intrinsically linked to the body. This means that not just our senses (hearing, sight, touch, etc.) are part of embodied sensation but so are emotions. For example, when Merleau-Ponty describes what it is like to be angry with someone, he says that the feeling of anger is bound up with the body of the person who feels angry. He says ‘I can still define man [...] as thought which is somehow strangely joined to a bodily apparatus without either the mechanics of the body or the transparency of thought being compromised by their being mixed together in this way.’<sup>597</sup> This idea of mixing or interweaving (*entrelacs*) rejects dualistic ideas which separate the inner world from the outer. Merleau-Ponty suggests that this process begins in infancy since a small child is able to recognise anger (or some other emotion) in those around them, even before she can comprehend such emotions by self-observation. ‘This is because the body of the other and its various movements appear to the infant to have been invested from the outset with an emotional significance.’<sup>598</sup> So a person’s identity, it would seem, is completely tied to the person’s body. He goes on to say that

Everyone is alone and yet nobody can do without other people, not just because they are useful (which is not in dispute here) but also when it comes to happiness. There is no way of living with others which takes away the burden of being myself, which allows me not to have an opinion; there is no ‘inner’ life that is not a first attempt to relate to another person. In this ambiguous position, which has been forced on us because we have a body and a history (both personally and collectively), we can never know complete rest.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*(Belknap Press, 2007). p. 158. For Sen’s capabilities approach see A. Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*(Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>597</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*(Routledge, 2008). p. 65.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid. p. 65.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid. pp. 66-67.

This would imply that our lives are inextricably linked to other people both in the present and as part of our past. It is therefore not impossible to infer that the eschatological life will also include other people. Although ‘we can never know complete rest’ might suggest that this is a disadvantage, it might also be argued that complete rest would be something negative, the absence of life. Of course, Merleau-Ponty was not concerning himself with an eschatological view, but only with the present. Nevertheless his philosophy brings confirmation of the importance of taking an embodied view of life. In the present world this leads to the affirmation of community, as when he remarks that ‘[w]e should no longer pride ourselves on being a community of pure spirits; let us look instead at the real relationships between people in our societies.’<sup>600</sup>

Here Merleau-Ponty is giving a philosopher’s justification for the eschaton as a place of community, where embodiment is the means to link identity to relationships. Havi Carel summarises Merleau-Ponty as offering an alternative to Descartes by regarding the human being as ‘A perceiving, feeling and thinking animal, rooted within a meaningful context and interacting with things and people within its surroundings.’<sup>601</sup> Thus what makes a person human is the relationships with other humans, and bodily resurrection is essential in order for relationships to be a feature of heaven. Without the need for relationships there would be no need for embodiment. If we are just pure spirit, pure soul, then we could simply commune with God, who is spirit, without the need for a body. It is because we need to communicate with other people that we need bodies. As Iozzio asserts ‘Embodiedness is that feature of human-being which distinguishes one person from another.’<sup>602</sup> By picturing someone in our mind’s eye we are able to conjure up that person in our imagination. We do not picture their spirit, but we picture their whole self, body and spirit. When Merleau-Ponty says ‘I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it’,<sup>603</sup> this statement can be extended to the deduction that other people are *their* bodies. If this is the case then recognising another person in heaven will necessarily mean perceiving their body, in some form or another.

### 2.3 The instructive case of Dementia

We now look at another situation which can help us to explore what it means to be human: the case of Dementia. Some key insights here come from John Swinton, who has developed

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid. pp. 67-68.

<sup>601</sup> Carel, *Illness: The Cry of the Flesh*. p. 25.

<sup>602</sup> Iozzio, "From a Consideration of Disability." p. 44.

<sup>603</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967). p. 150.

theological reflections on various aspects of disability. Swinton, writing specifically about Dementia, challenges the idea that higher cortical functioning is the defining aspect of what makes people human. Instead he argues that ‘the capacities to love, relate, touch and feel’<sup>604</sup> are possibly even more important than the ability to remember, make calculations and draw inferences, features which typically form part of what psychologists define as higher cortical functions. It may be misleading to describe such functions as ‘higher’, since they are culturally defined by those who invented the definitions.

Swinton’s description of what it means to be human centres on five areas. First he argues that humans are ‘dependent and contingent’ by which he means that we are creatures who are totally dependent upon God, without whom we would not exist. Secondly he considers the aspect of embodiment, meaning that we experience the world through our bodies. Those bodies are enlivened by the soul, which he also refers to using the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Thus he claims that ‘Human beings are animated earth which contains the very breath of God. As animated souls, our *raison d’être* is to be with God.’<sup>605</sup> He develops this idea by considering the importance of both giving and receiving care as features of what it means to be human. Thus the person who receives care is able to make visible the love which God has for humanity.

The third area Swinton considers is that of relationality, something which he considers distinguishes humans from animals, as described in the Genesis account of creation, where Adam is chosen to have a personal relationship with God the creator. ‘Adam’s status as a human being was defined as special for no other reason than that God chose it to be so. This primary, divinely given gift of relationship is an inalienable source of human identity, value, worth and dignity.’<sup>606</sup> The fourth and fifth areas he discusses are about the contrasting aspects of being broken and lost against those of being and loved and purposeful. These areas expand upon the relationship aspects of identity.

The major argument of Swinton’s book, and the key area for this discussion, is that when people develop dementia they are not forgotten by God. ‘To be human is to be held in the memory of God. God watches over human beings, knows them intimately, and remembers them.’<sup>607</sup> By saying this Swinton expresses an important message of hope for people with

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<sup>604</sup> J. Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*(Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012). p. 61.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid. p 169.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid. p 179.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid. p 211.

Dementia and those who love them, because the fear that the person has vanished is replaced by the assurance that they are still held in God's care. He points out that people are mistaken when they think that a person consists of their cognitive and intellectual faculties. So even when the person themselves has forgotten who they are, God still remembers who they are.<sup>608</sup>

He goes on to explain how memories can be deceptive, and how we can look back on events with the benefit of hindsight and understand them in a different way. This leads him to the conclusion that 'this is precisely what will happen on Judgement Day when God shows us what our lives were *really* like, rather than what we remember them to be.'<sup>609</sup> This is important for the question about 'how will you know me?' as God presumably knows us as we really are, unlike those whose simple, faulty memories create a false picture of who we are.

### Summary of identity

Now we can summarise the argument so far. From Irenaeus comes the image of creation as work in progress. The Fall amounts to little more than a stage in the process of learning from experience, rather than the terrible expulsion from the paradise garden with which Augustine would characterise the sin of Adam. From Williams comes the belief that creatures are dependent beings, whose identity is a gift from their creator. Relationships are an essential feature of the human condition, although the term 'interdependence' is a more appropriate one to use to describe relationships than 'dependence' since it is the inter-relationships of people that create communities.

Identity is entirely integrated with the body, and the body is woven into the fabric of identity. This means that embodiment will continue in the eschaton and that relationships will continue to be dependent upon the bodiliness of individuals in heaven. The wholeness of created beings must be continued into the life of the world to come and that creatureliness will be maintained to include embodiment. Some helpful insights have been discussed from considering the condition of Dementia, including the idea that for some people being remembered by God is a supportive way to deal with loss of personal memory. The following

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<sup>608</sup> Myles Werntz comments that Swinton does not make it clear how the process of God remembering people happens. 'Swinton helpfully offers a variety of church practices which mirror divine action, so one must assume that this mirroring is how the work of God becomes operative.' The difficulty with this assumption is that it leaves unanswered the question of what happens, then, if the church community fails to care for someone with Dementia. Myles Werntz, "Dementia: Living in the Memories of God by John Swinton" *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 20, no. 2 (2013). p.331.

<sup>609</sup> Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*. p 207.



section will explore the theological aspects of these ideas by looking at identity in heaven and what this might mean for people with disabilities.

### 3. A Theology of the Eschaton

A theology of identity is always also a theology dealing with ‘first’ and ‘last’ things.

Questions of relationality and embodiment are also relevant for a theology of the eschaton.

The kind of questions considered in this section will be the same ones that were discussed about earth. To what extent is our heavenly identity (if there is such a thing) bound up with embodiment? How do relationships occur in heaven? Four different models are included in an attempt to answer these questions in a way that will be satisfactory for both able and impaired people.

#### 3.1 Identity in Heaven

In order to be identified in heaven we will need our own self-identity, which could be something we have without a body. But we will also need to be able to be identified by others. Heaven is a community, not a place where we merely exist alone. As Joseph Ratzinger who reflected extensively about the eschaton asserts, ‘those who have been called by God are themselves part of the concept of God.’<sup>610</sup> Furthermore he explains that in the resurrection of Jesus, ‘what is affirmed is that God himself, and the communion he offers, are life. To belong to him, to be called by him, is to be rooted in life indestructible.’<sup>611</sup> He then goes on to explain that ‘communion with God, which is the native place of life indestructible, finds its concrete form in sharing in the body of Christ.’<sup>612</sup> By using the word ‘concrete’ here, Ratzinger is emphasising the bodiliness of the place of God, which includes the bodiliness of heaven. But there is also another implication, that of realised eschatology, when he says:

The resurrection does not appear as a distant apocalyptic event but as an occurrence which takes place in the immediate present. Whenever someone enters into the ‘I’ of Christ, he has entered straight away into the space of unconditional life.<sup>613</sup>

‘Unconditional life’ could mean another form of salvation, being saved from conditions or restrictions, such as the restrictions we have on earth. An example of this is in the gospel accounts of Jesus after the resurrection when he appears to be able to move through solid

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<sup>610</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*. p. 113.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid. p. 114.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid. p. 117.

walls, appearing in the upper room even though the doors were locked.<sup>614</sup> Speaking of immortality Ratzinger says that ‘part of the Christian idea of immortality is fellowship with other human beings. Man is not engaged in a solitary dialogue with God. He does not enter an eternity with God which belongs to him alone.’<sup>615</sup> Then he repeats this idea again saying, ‘Eternal life does not isolate a person, but leads him out of isolation into true unity with his brothers and sisters and the whole of God’s creation.’<sup>616</sup> Thus relationship and identity are both necessary features of heaven.

Ratzinger’s description of how the integration of individuals and the whole will take place is instructive.

For the redeemed are not simply adjacent to each other in heaven. Rather, in their being together as the one Christ, they are heaven. In that moment, the whole creation will become song. It will be a single act in which, forgetful of self, the individual will break through the limits of being into the whole, and the whole take up its dwelling in the individual. It will be joy in which all questioning is resolved and satisfied.<sup>617</sup>

This also reassures us that eventually all our questions, even those unanswered here, will be answered. The limits of our earthly lives will be transcended, and the barriers which seem insurmountable now will be overcome in a way which exceeds anything we could imagine. There will be a special *koinonia* in heaven. The orthodox theologian, Philip Kariatlis, discusses the use of the term *koinonia* in the New Testament. Although these discussions go far beyond the scope of this work, they nevertheless are interesting in the way that community is linked to holiness in 1 Cor 1:2 where the church is described as comprising those who are called to be saints together. He emphasises the importance of the word ‘together’ here as the saintliness or holiness of the community is because they are together. Holiness is something you can only achieve in a community. Saints are not referred to in the singular.

Yet, holiness was not only a description of the future vocation of the Christian church but signified also its present status since Christ would continue to be present amongst the faithful. In this sense, the eschatological gift of the holiness of the community was bestowed upon the church already in their historical context as a sign and gift of

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<sup>614</sup> John 20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’

<sup>615</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*. p. 159.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid. p. 238.

God's unwavering fidelity that He would always be with them when they would assemble together and call upon his name.<sup>618</sup>

This idea of God-with-us is something that becomes most effective when God is with a community. God does reveal himself to individuals, but that is not the purpose of his plan for us. The people of Israel were a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart, not a group of individuals who had been chosen and set apart.

Kariatlis then explores the tension between the idea of God's gift having already been received and the knowledge that its fullness is yet to be realised.

Meanwhile, even though God had already granted the gift of *koinonia* to the church and would continue to do so until the end of time, the faithful within the church had to continue to make God's promise a daily goal striving to make this *koinonia* more real in their daily lives.<sup>619</sup>

This has been included here to illustrate *koinonia* as community, showing how this is something that requires attention to maintain.

*Koinonia* has also been seen as an essential feature of ecumenical dialogue, where the term is often thought of as synonymous with communion. But this is not its only meaning as O'Driscoll explains.

However, it is important to stress that *koinonia* in its biblical sense denotes communion with God as well as with one another (1 John 1:3). The church in its members is continually being called into fullness of communion with God as well as into fullness of communion with one another. These two are inextricably linked.<sup>620</sup>

It would seem reasonable to assume that perfect communion with God and with other people will be achieved in heaven, but that in the meantime it is something to strive for here on earth.

Identity in heaven, in the light of what has been said before, must consider embodiment, relationships and self-identity. Self-identity can be considered as a product of two dimensions, the first being who we are and the second being who God made us to be. This is explained by Davis who says:

My continuing integrity through time as the person that I am [...] is based not just on my own properties but also on the fact that God sustains and upholds me as that

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<sup>618</sup> P. Kariatlis, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia*(ATF Press, 2011). p. 44

<sup>619</sup> Ibid. p. 47

<sup>620</sup> Mary O'Driscoll, "Thoughts on the Ecclesiology Text," in *Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting*, ed. Alan Falconer(Geneva: WCC, 1998). p. 112.

person by recognising and calling me. Both are necessary for my existence; neither is sufficient.<sup>621</sup>

Although this statement offers a convenient summary of identity, identifying as it does the two dimensions and the importance of each, it does not, however, explain the need for a body, the need to be embodied, because it says nothing about relationships with others. What it does include, however, is the key idea of the importance of God's call, and his recognition. The recognition of God is also implied by Habgood's idea of being 'held in the mind of God.'<sup>622</sup> Thus we can also be sure that even if we lose sight of our own identity, as could happen in the case of patients with Alzheimer's, then God still sustains us and remembers us. As John Swinton explains, 'God's memory has to do with sustenance and action. To be remembered is to be sustained. [...] To be remembered is to be the recipient of divine action.'<sup>623</sup>

### 3.2 Models

Taking my cue from Avery Dulles, I use the term models as a way of illustrating something which is a mystery too complex to describe or define by a single idea.<sup>624</sup> In this section I propose four models for understanding what identity will be like in heaven. I have decided to name these models as the egalitarian agnostic, egalitarian complex-substantial, identity agnostic and identity complex-substantial. My original idea was to have just two models, egalitarian and identity, but it gradually became apparent that the simple two-way distinction was insufficient to cope with the different nuances which I required in order to arrive at a more substantial answer to the question of identity in the eschaton. Thus the two complex-substantial variants were added to the original concepts. This is an attempt to construct a systematic series of models, and the final one is treated in a separate section since this is my preferred model. At the beginning I set out to answer the question 'what will heaven be like for someone with a disability?' The answer could be simply that they will be completely cured of their disability because everyone will be perfect (i.e. the same) in heaven. This idea forms the egalitarian models below, but two variants are needed to answer the secondary

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<sup>621</sup> Stephen T Davis, "Resurrection, Personal Identity, and the Will of God," in *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive Our Death?*, ed. G. Gasser (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010). p 27.

<sup>622</sup> 'Amid all the flux of changing relationships, different periods of life, developing and diminishing capacities, gains and losses, tragedies and triumphs, there is that which remains secure,' Habgood, *Being a Person: Where Faith and Science Meet*. p. 227-8.

<sup>623</sup> Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*. p. 214.

<sup>624</sup> 'Mysteries are realities of which we cannot speak directly. If we wish to talk about them at all we must draw on analogies afforded by our experience of the world. These analogies provide models.' A. Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 2002). p. 2.

question of how this will be achieved. An agnostic model supposes that we simply do not know how this happens while a more complex answer will try to suggest a more substantial solution. The alternative to this egalitarian approach is to say that we will not all be the same, because we will retain our individual identity. Agnostically we would have to say that we do not know how this could come about. The final model, therefore, is a development of this into a more complex answer, one which tries to retain identity by redefining what is meant by recognition in the eschaton.

### *3.2.1. First Approach: the egalitarian agnostic model.*

The egalitarian agnostic model argues that we will all be equal in the eschaton, but we do not know how this will happen, or what form such equality will take. How we will recognise each other could then be approached in an agnostic way by saying that we will all be healed from our disabilities, but we do not know how. With this approach the eschaton might be thought of as a place where all disabilities are removed, and yet something remains which enables those previously disabled people to be identified. Could there be some essence of identity which will be discernible to others, so that someone who no longer has Down's syndrome, for example, can still be recognised? What this essence of identity might be is not possible for us, here on earth, to say. This kind of agnostic answer has some merit. It allows us to function as rational human beings in this world without worrying about what will happen in the next. It allows for a concept of individual identity which still remains a mystery. In a sense there is something unknowable in everyone. There is, as Brian Brock points out, something unsatisfactory about a model in which 'heaven is that place where we all become "normal," all our bodies finally conform to the Hollywood ideal, and we are transformed into the socially adept and well-liked people we would like to be.'<sup>625</sup> The major drawback with such a view is that it diminishes diversity and confirms stereotypes about what is ideal, thereby undermining disabled people's quest for equality and recognition.

Nevertheless an agnostic answer does have some merit as it is flexible since it implies that 'for God all things are possible'<sup>626</sup> so everything will be resolved in the eschaton and we do not need to be concerned about how this will happen. Augustine tells his congregation that 'the life of the angels is a secret, none should enquire further'<sup>627</sup> implying that we are not really meant to know what heaven will be like. He further argues:

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<sup>625</sup> Brock, "Autism, Care, and Christian Hope." p. 17.

<sup>626</sup> Matt 19:26

<sup>627</sup> Augustine, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 10. Sermon 362.27 p 263.

But when we see face to face what we now see through a mirror in a riddle, we shall then say with quite a different, an inexpressibly different feeling of love, “It’s true”; and when we say this, we shall of course be saying Amen, but with a kind of never satisfied satisfaction. Because there will be nothing lacking, you see, that’s why complete satisfaction; but because what is not lacking will always be giving delight, that’s why, if one can so put it, it will be an unsatisfied satisfaction.<sup>628</sup>

This passage conveys similar ideas to the extract from Ratzinger mentioned above (in section 3.1), in that it supposes that in heaven all our questions will be answered, all the unsatisfied puzzles will be resolved. The phrase ‘unsatisfied satisfaction’ means that it will never come to an end, it will be ongoing. Perhaps it is a never-ending satisfaction because there are no unanswered questions, no unresolved issues. Nevertheless, this reasoning does leave the unsatisfactory feeling that an agnostic answer is an escape into mystery, where ‘mystery’ is a label used to cover up any ignorance that cannot be explained.

Some insights from the Contemplative tradition may be worth considering here. This approach could offer an answer which does not attempt to explain how disabled people will appear in the eschaton, but which simply considers that everyone will simply *be* in the presence of God. One of the goals of contemplation is to remove oneself from intellectual analysis and respond in an interior way which goes beyond mere knowing. This is the path to the place which Thomas Merton calls ‘a supernatural love and knowledge of God, simple and obscure, infused by him into the summit of the soul, giving it a direct and experimental contact with him.’<sup>629</sup> This is an idea which is also touched on by Swinton who suggests:

In this way the contemplative tradition brings us clearly and gently into the knowledge that all we have is gift, and that no matter how hard we strive to get closer to God, in the end it is he who comes to us and not the other way around.<sup>630</sup>

The apophatic tradition refuses to attribute names to God, arguing that it is impossible to know God and so God cannot be described or defined in human language. This observation comes from the Cloud of Unknowing:

It is God, and he alone, who can fully satisfy the hunger and longing of our spirit which transformed by his redeeming grace is enabled to embrace him by love. He whom neither men nor angels can grasp by knowledge can be embraced by love. For

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<sup>628</sup> Augustine et al., *Sermons (230-272b) on the Liturgical Seasons*. Sermon 262, 29. p 266.

<sup>629</sup> T. Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation: And, What Is Contemplation?* (A. Clarke, 1975). p 98.

<sup>630</sup> Swinton, J “Known By God”, in Reinders, *The Paradox of Disability: Responses to Jean Vanier and L’Arche Communities from Theology and the Sciences*. p 145.

the intellect of both men and angels is too small to comprehend God as he is in himself.<sup>631</sup>

The egalitarian agnostic model leaves many unanswered questions, although it could be argued that these are the very questions which will be answered in heaven. Perhaps it is not possible for us to have all the answers here and now, because we are not yet in heaven. Our minds are not able to grasp these things now, and Paul suggests that the question is a foolish one.<sup>632</sup> It is because of the shortcomings of this model that the following suggestion is for a more complex approach.

### *3.2.2 Second approach: the egalitarian complex-substantial model.*

This is a more complex and substantial answer which includes the idea that we will all have the bodies of angels, or angelic bodies which are also sometimes referred to as spiritual bodies. This model might allow for some equal features of the resurrected bodies to be equal, while also allowing for differences. There will be continuity, but perhaps not in every aspect of our being. There is the Platonic temptation to consider we will all be like spheres, where all differences are levelled out. This would mean that we cease to be different because difference is a sign of imperfection. But levelling out can mean levelling down which would not be an acceptable solution to the problem. In this section, therefore, we will explore the idea of spiritual or angelic bodies a little further.

Augustine speaks several times of spiritual bodies. For example he mentions this phrase in the *Literal Meaning of Genesis* (6:19), in the context of a discussion about 1 Cor 15:44, when he says we will have spiritual bodies in the resurrection and also says that ‘we shall enjoy equality with the angels of God.’<sup>633</sup> In one of the sermons on the psalms he talks about ‘a heavenly, spiritual body, an angelic body fit for the companionship of angels.’<sup>634</sup> Then in a letter he says

But when we begin to have a spiritual body, which is promised in the resurrection, whether we see it by the mind or in a wondrous way also by the body, since the grace

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<sup>631</sup> Anon, *The Cloud of Unknowing: And the Book of Privy Counseling*, ed. William Johnston (New York: Random House, 2005). 44, 42.

<sup>632</sup> Paul admonishes the Christian community for asking the wrong question ‘But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?’ How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.’ (1 Cor 15:35-36) He takes this opportunity to underline how different the heavenly, spiritual bodies will be from the earthly ones.

<sup>633</sup> Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2. Book 6, Ch 24. He quotes here from Matthew 22.30.

<sup>634</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*. Ps 145.3. p 402.

of a spiritual body is ineffable, we shall in accord with our capacity, nonetheless, see it.<sup>635</sup>

Augustine clearly believed that in the resurrection we would have angelic bodies<sup>636</sup> but this does not mean that we would all be the same as angels in heaven. Augustine also says ‘we too, of course, if we finish the course, will be equal to the angels of God.’<sup>637</sup> This does not mean, however, that we will *be* angels, only that we will be the equal of the angels. The distinction between humans and angels is also explored by Aquinas who occasionally makes what appear to be contradictory claims. On the one hand he argues that regarding ‘the grade of nature, men can in no way be assumed into the angelic orders; for the natural distinction will always remain.’<sup>638</sup> By this he means that men and angels are by nature different and always will be different. But on the other hand he later says that ‘by the gift of grace men can merit glory in such a degree as to be equal to the angels, in each of the angelic grades; and this implies that men are taken up into the orders of angels.’<sup>639</sup> He then quotes Augustine who says that ‘there will not be two societies of men and angels, but only one; because the beatitude of all is to cleave to God alone.’<sup>640</sup> This explains that people will not become indistinguishable from angels, but they will be equal to angels. This illustrates that the simple idea that we will become angels, or we will have angelic bodies and therefore lose our human identity, is incorrect. Aquinas also says that angels have no bodies. ‘The angels have not bodies naturally united to them.’ (see 51.1) This suggests that it is over-simplistic to say that we will have angelic bodies in heaven, thus implying that Augustine’s notion of angelic bodies requires refinement.

Teresa of Avila, talking about her vision of the Lord, says that ‘such is the beauty of glorified bodies, and such the supernatural glory which surrounds them, that it throws all who gaze upon them into confusion.’<sup>641</sup> Teresa would have thought, then, that the glorified bodies of the eschaton were difficult to perceive, let alone to describe.

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<sup>635</sup> Augustine, *Letters: Volume Ii* (83-130). Ep. 120.17 (p 138-9)

<sup>636</sup> See his sermon 362 where he explains the story of Jesus being asked a question about the woman with seven husbands. Augustine, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 10. p 21.

<sup>637</sup> Augustine et al., *Sermons (51-94) on the New Testament*. Sermon 73.4, p 293.

<sup>638</sup> T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*(Authentic Publishers, 2012). I, Q.108, Art.8.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. I, Q.108, Art.8.

<sup>640</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. XII, 9.

<sup>641</sup> St Teresa of Avila and J. Cohen, *The Life of St Teresa of Avila by Herself*(Penguin Books Limited, 2004). p 196.



It is notable that the current wording of the prayer used at Roman Catholic funerals says ‘from the earth he will raise up in the flesh those who have died’<sup>642</sup> something which seems to contradict Augustine who says that ‘in the heavenly realm there is no flesh, only pure and radiant bodies, which the Apostle calls ‘spiritual’.’<sup>643</sup> This was mentioned by Augustine as part of his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:50, ‘I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.’ The wording of the funeral prayers is supported by the Catechism of the Catholic Church which includes a reference to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. The statement reads: ‘So, in him, “all of them will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear,” but Christ “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body,” into a “spiritual body”’.<sup>644</sup> This seems to offer two alternative views, one, that resurrection bodies will be the same as earthy ones, and the other that those bodies will be transformed into spiritual ones. Those who ask how this happens are told that ‘This “how” exceeds our imagination and understanding; it is accessible only to faith.’<sup>645,646</sup> These two views are unresolved, and possibly unresolvable. On the one hand we could have fleshy bodies at the resurrection, while on the other hand they could be spiritual bodies, whatever we may think that means. In some ways the term ‘spiritual bodies’ is a convenient label for something unknown and unknowable, hence the term may more correctly belong in the agnostic section above. Alternatively the idea of a spiritual body is open to a variety of interpretations, and can therefore be correctly situated in this, the section of the complex model. In any case our

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<sup>642</sup> From the website [http://www.ibrevariary.com/m/messale.php?s=liturgia\\_eucaristica&id=74](http://www.ibrevariary.com/m/messale.php?s=liturgia_eucaristica&id=74) ‘Remember your servant N. whom you have called (today) from this world to yourself. Grant that he (she) who was united with your Son in a death like his, may also be one with him in his Resurrection, when from the earth he will raise up in the flesh those who have died, and transform our lowly body after the pattern of his own glorious body. To our departed brothers and sisters, too, and to all who were pleasing to you at their passing from this life, give kind admittance to your kingdom. There we hope to enjoy forever the fullness of your glory, when you will wipe away every tear from our eyes. For seeing you, our God, as you are, we shall be like you for all the ages and praise you without end.’

<sup>643</sup> Augustine, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects. Faith and the Creed* 10, 24 p. 344

<sup>644</sup> Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Doubleday, 2003). 999. The reference to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 is DS 801. See also ‘Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.’ (Phil 3:21) and ‘it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.’ (1 Cor 15:44).

<sup>645</sup> Ibid. 1000.

<sup>646</sup> The words used in the Anglican Church do not mention the resurrection of the flesh, perhaps because the feeling is that people do not need to be reminded of bodily resurrection at the time of a funeral where the need is more to comfort the bereaved in their loss. The words used at the Committal are ‘We have entrusted our brother/sister N to God’s mercy, and we now commit his/her body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust: in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our frail bodies that they may be conformed to his glorious body, who died, was buried, and rose again for us. To him be glory for ever.’ From the Funeral resources at <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1174624/cw%20pastoral%20services%20funeral%20web.pdf> page 269.

current understanding of the term ‘spiritual body’ may be very different from that of Paul, as Wright reminds us. When speaking about the resurrection of Jesus, Wright argues that

First-century Jews held a variety of beliefs about what God would do with, or to, his people after their death. But ‘resurrection’ was never a term covering lots of different options on that score. It had to do, specifically, with re-embodiment, with a new physical existence. When Paul talks about a ‘spiritual body’ (1 Cor 15:44), he doesn’t mean ‘spiritual’ in the Platonic sense, i.e. non-material. He means a body (physical, in some sense), which is constituted by ‘spirit’.<sup>647</sup>

Wright’s interpretation offers a different approach from that of Augustine. When Augustine talks about spiritual bodies he may have taken a more Platonic view. Wright also argues that for St Paul the Jewish idea of apocalypse had now already occurred and the Age to Come (what Wright calls ‘The Eschaton of Jewish expectation’<sup>648</sup>) had already arrived, although it was happening in stages. The Jews had now been redeemed and the Gentiles were to be invited now to share in that redemption. This is related to the topic of realised eschatology which has been covered elsewhere.<sup>649</sup>

The story of the woman with seven husbands has already been discussed<sup>650</sup> and the conclusion Augustine came to was that in heaven we will be male and female but will have the bodies of angels, with no need to reproduce since we will no longer be subject to decay. Augustine’s answer still does not fully explain what angelic bodies are like, other than that Augustine believed there would be no sexual relations in heaven. This view does not contribute substantially to the overall questions of this thesis about identity in the eschaton. The woman with seven husbands will still have the problems of having seven husbands, even if this does not entail conjugal relations with any of them.

Although because of its complexity this model does have some advantages over the previous one, it nevertheless leaves unresolved the issues of what angelic bodies are like, in what ways they are similar to earthly bodies and in what ways they differ. These questions will be returned to in the final model (section 3.3).

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<sup>647</sup> N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997). p 50.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid. p 51.

<sup>649</sup> Chapter 2, section 1.2 and Chapter 3, section 5.

<sup>650</sup> Chapter 2, section 3.3.

### 3.2.3 *Third approach: the identity agnostic model.*

Whereas the previous two models were concerned with equality in the eschaton, the identity-agnostic model focuses more on the idea of difference. This model suggests that that we will retain our identity in some way, but how we will recognise that identity, and the identity of others, is a mystery. The word mystery derives from the Greek word *mysterion* meaning something hidden or secret. ‘A mystery is something which we cannot think clearly, cannot get our minds around, cannot manage to grasp.’<sup>651</sup> This means, as Kaufman reminds us, that a mystery tells us something about ourselves, that is our inability to understand something, rather than something about the object of the mystery. When we say that the Holy Trinity is a mystery, this tells us nothing about the Holy Trinity. Instead it tells us that speaking of the Holy Trinity is attempting to understand something that is beyond human comprehension. This does not mean that we should not speak about such mysteries, but that instead we need to remember to be critical of attempts to understand them. One advantage, therefore, of this agnostic model is that it openly acknowledges the aspect of mystery whilst at the same time attempting to ask the right questions about the subject.

By adopting the identity agnostic model we can say that, whilst some features of disability will be removed, not all of the aspects which we now interpret as disability will disappear. We have to admit that we cannot tell which features will remain, but we must be clear that sufficient features of the disabled person will remain to enable full recognition of them. Their identity will remain intact. What will have changed will be their surroundings. The person in a wheelchair will be able to perform exactly the same tasks as a person not in a wheelchair. In this way heaven would be a triumph for the social model of disability, since the social causes of disability would be fully recognised and all anti-discrimination procedures would be fully implemented. No-one would suffer any kind of hardship as a result of their disability. People might have different abilities, but this will not matter. In some cases the person with a disability could have advantages over the able-bodied person. This would reflect the way everyone has different talents and skills on earth. Therefore in the eschaton people will have different abilities and capabilities, but no-one will suffer hardship because of something they cannot do.

Some theological aspects of this can be found in Aquinas who says ‘The soul rising again and the soul living in this world differ, not in essence but in respect of glory and misery, which is

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<sup>651</sup> G.D. Kaufman, *God, Mystery, Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World*(Fortress Press, 1996). p. 97.

an accidental difference. Hence it follows that the body in rising again differs, not in identity, but in condition, so that a difference of bodies corresponds proportionally to the difference of souls.’<sup>652</sup> Aquinas allows for differences. There is no concern here for equality. He also says that ‘Further, change of an accident does not cause a change of identity. Now the situation of parts is an accident. Therefore its change in a man does not cause a change of identity.’<sup>653</sup> This indicates that accidental differences are not important to the identity of the person.

One advantage of the identity-agnostic approach is that it allows a model where diversity is respected and for this reason this model is an improvement over the egalitarian models. A model which respects diversity can permit the finding of wholeness without needing a cure for the condition which afflicted a person in their earthly life. Some parents of children with disabilities reach a point where they accept their child’s condition in such a way that they would not want to seek a cure. Examples include the parents of children with Down’s Syndrome who can acknowledge that their lives have been enriched by having that child. Solomon cites parents who do not want to talk about the idea of a cure ‘because to talk about a cure is to diminish the value of the people who are alive with Down syndrome.’<sup>654</sup> Similar arguments are made against pre-natal screening because when a foetus is aborted it implies that those with the condition would be better off not having been born. One father when asked if he would want to wave a magic wand and cure his son of the condition gave a qualified answer. He said that for the sake of his son he would like a cure but that society is a better place because of diversity and so there is a conflict between the individual and society.

A similar argument has been made by some of those on the Autistic spectrum, where there is a wide range of degrees of impairment and difficulty. High-functioning Autistics contribute in diverse ways to society, by being creative, as exemplified by the animal scientist Temple Grandin. Grandin uses her Autistic ability to ‘think in pictures’ to design cattle chutes for the livestock industry. ‘I would not want to lose the ability to think visually. I have found my place along the great continuum.’<sup>655</sup> Grandin appreciates that not everyone can think as she does, and does not want to lose the variability in the way people think. A heaven full of high-

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<sup>652</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. III Suppl. Q. 79, A. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid. III Suppl. Q. 79, A. 3. sc.

<sup>654</sup> A. Solomon, *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*(Scribner, 2012). p 219.

<sup>655</sup> T. Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009). p 50.

functioning autistics would not fully represent the whole of the continuum to which she feels she belongs.

So far this model can overcome many of the disadvantages of the previous, egalitarian, models. Nevertheless there is a failure to address the question of how does it come about that everyone is different, identifiable, yet no longer disabled. In order to do this a completely different approach is needed, one which seeks for understanding in this present world in order to envisage a world which is yet to come.

### 3.3 Towards a social eschatology of disability: The identity complex-substantial model.

This suggestion has been developed against a background of all my conversational partners. This model is one which extends the social model of disability into the realm of Theology. Thus an attempt is made to investigate how far the social model can be developed in order to serve as a model for the eschaton. This is my preferred model since it involves looking at the eschaton from the place where we are now, this present world, at the same time as we stretch the imagination into an inconceivable and mysterious future which seems to be beyond our minds to understand.

This model attempts to overcome the shortcomings of the previous models described. The agnostic models stand back from interacting with the mystery, whereas this model takes a different approach. Instead of looking at mysteries beyond our grasp, this model looks at what can be seen and recognised as reflecting heaven in this world. By recognising when we witness 'heaven on earth' we can peer through a window into the unknowable. By identifying what might be called good practice in caring for people with disabilities in this life we can project this understanding into a future where all relations will follow a model of best practice.

Another difficulty with previously described models is that the egalitarian ones have a tendency to diminish difference. This model celebrates difference and recognises that diversity is the work of the creator who did not create everyone to be identical or to conform to some supposed norm. Instead the variety among human beings brings a richness and excitement to life, something which must surely be sustained in the eschaton.

This, the complex, substantial identity-based answer, is a model which involves looking through the glass darkly here on earth and this cautious peering becomes a process of seeing

face to face in the eschaton.<sup>656</sup> It involves appreciating how much our present world reveals about who we are, and then considers how our future selves might be capable of revealing more than we are able to reveal here and now. It involves being able to see people more clearly than we can see them now. It involves a mixture of joy and sorrow but where the two become fused into one stream of ecstasy, perhaps something tentatively grasped by saints and mystics who were given ecstatic visions. With this model we retain a substantial part of our identity, but not necessarily all of it.<sup>657</sup>

Augustine speaks of the potential of each person where what they might become is within them like a seed.<sup>658</sup> Could it be that what we become in heaven is the person whose full potential has then been realised? The identity complex-substantial conclusion might allow that seed to be an identity which is given by God, but an identity which is hidden in this life. Only God really knows that true identity, and in heaven it will be revealed, confirmed, secured and protected from any kind of damage. We might say that, in this life, sin damages our identity, and that true identity will only be revealed when we are in a place where sin cannot touch us, that is in heaven. So in heaven the person will be changed, as it says in 1 Cor 15:52, but changed into the person they already are.

One implication of this relates to how we can glimpse heaven on earth when we receive insights, or glimpses, of someone's hidden potential. If God does not need the DDA<sup>659</sup>, and if the heavenly legacy of the Paralympic Games of 2012 is the perfect integration of disabled people with able-bodied people, then these glimpses of heaven on earth will be unfolded in heaven as the perfect place for anyone, whether they are disabled or not. Those who currently struggle to make their voices heard, or struggle to be understood, will be perfectly understood and will be recognised as having wonderful gifts for all to receive. Those whose gifts and skills and talents are currently not visible will be shown to be beloved sons and daughters of God, perfect in every way, in accordance with the divine plan. What we perceive today to be challenges will be seen as opportunities to reveal the glory of God, as Jesus says of the man

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<sup>656</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12 In the King James version this reads 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.'

<sup>657</sup> The story of Mark Ormrod, a Royal Marine who lost two legs and an arm in a land-mine explosion, is illustrative here. As he lay in his hospital bed, wondering what people would think when they saw the seriousness of his injuries, he still felt that he was the same person as before the explosion. He was relieved when he was accepted by his family and girlfriend largely because his face had not changed. Mark Ormrod, *Man Down* (Transworld Publishers Limited, 2010).

<sup>658</sup> Augustine, *City of God*. Book 22, Ch. 14.

<sup>659</sup> The Disability Discrimination Act (2005). See Chapter 1, footnote 54, for further information.

who was blind from birth.<sup>660</sup> Those hardships we endure today will be transformed into something glorious, like the wounds of the saints. Those who today look helplessly on as they face a flight of steps with their wheelchairs will rejoice, not because the steps are not there, nor because the wheelchair grows wings, but because an army of firemen will suddenly appear, happy to perform the task they can do with ease, and lift the wheelchair to the top of the flight.<sup>661</sup>

This complex-substantial identity conclusion is the one which offers the most hope for our present life, in terms of the way we can try to imitate the Kingdom of God. Perhaps we cannot imagine what someone with Down's Syndrome who has been 'healed' of their condition would appear like to us in the future. We can, however, imagine what life might be like if no-one suffered from their disability, since the social model has made it clear how disabilities are socially constructed and therefore how they might be de-constructed. The glimpses of heaven on earth which L'Arche communities have offered also give us an idea of what such a heaven might be like. In this image of heaven the boundaries between the helpers and the helped become blurred. Who is giving and who is receiving when a learning-disabled person brings joy and satisfaction to the person helping them? The mutual sharing of gifts, the mutual recognition of being beloved, the mutual exploration of the pilgrimage journey are all useful images for this kind of heaven. We can know what heaven might be like, because we have seen pictures, snapshots, of heaven when everything works as it should in the reciprocal love of human persons.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> John 9:3 This has also been mentioned on page 161, in Section 1.2 of this chapter, and elsewhere. (Chapter 1, section 4, Chapter 2, section 1, Chapter 3, section 1 and Chapter 5, section 2.)

<sup>661</sup> The idea for this image came from talking to Liska Stefko about one of the L'Arche core members who wanted to take part in a carnival parade but had to be helped onto the float by a group of firemen who fortuitously appeared at the right moment.

<sup>662</sup> A further insight can be found from looking at the movement which has evolved in the United States known as neurodiversity. This offers an alternative way of looking at autism, one which does not consider autism to be a disease, but rather an expression of difference. 'In its broadest sense the concept of neurodiversity regards atypical neurological development as a normal human difference.' Pier Jaarsma and Stellan Welin, "Autism as a Natural Human Variation: Reflections on the Claims of the Neurodiversity Movement," *Health Care Analysis* 20, no. 1 (2012). p 20. The implications of this are that people with autism, for example, should be given rights in the same way that those who have alternative sexuality are given rights. Autists, as they may be called, would wish to be regarded as an underprivileged minority, deserving of additional resources to meet their needs. See also <http://neurodiversity.com/main.html>. The neurodiversity metaphor deals predominantly with Autistic spectrum disorders but has more recently widened its interests to include other conditions as diverse as Down's Syndrome, Tourette's syndrome and Dyspraxia. Supporters argue that instead of trying to make those who have a condition 'normal' we should instead celebrate their diversity, along with all the benefits that such diversity brings. Rather than speaking of those who are normal or abnormal they would prefer the terms 'typical' or 'atypical' since these terms indicate statistical normality rather than desirability. Unfortunately neurodiversity activists can become very combative and their focus on scientific disputes about vaccine damage theories means that the real message of celebrating diversity can sometimes get lost within the polarised arguments. A clearer summary of the problem comes from an Autism specialist, Simon Baron-Cohen, who says that 'Autism is both a

Some key insights come from Jean Vanier who identifies an important dichotomy between the need to belong to a community and the need to be an individual. Managing this dichotomy requires an ability to live with insecurity, because we sometimes need to challenge the assumptions of the community or of the individual in order to be able to hold two contrasting needs in balance. As Vanier explains ‘we want to find freedom but we want to find it within some kind of structure.’<sup>663</sup> In order to do this, members of the group need to be able to live with insecurity and the group as a whole needs to be brave enough to question what happens within the group. It is important to recognise that there are dangers, particularly in closed groups which can turn into sects.

Vanier explains that there are four signs of a healthy group.<sup>664</sup> These are being open to the weak and needy, listening to the needs of individuals, moving out from behind protective walls and trying to evolve new ways of working.

We all belong to each other, we are all there for each other. God, too, is for us as we are for God. We are called to grow in order to become fully ourselves and fully alive, to receive from others, and to give to others, not being held back by fears, prejudices, or feelings of superiority or inferiority.<sup>665</sup>

From this consideration of community life Vanier moves to talk about the heart, explaining how the heart does not seek success, power or privilege, but tries to reach out to others. He then describes how fear is at the basis of prejudice and discrimination, because people are afraid of those who are different from them, or afraid of being seen as different from their own society if they reach out to touch those who are in need. He considers some broad categories for objects of fear, including fear of dissidents, of difference, of failure, and fear of loss and change. The deep basis for all these fears is that we are afraid of not being loved, and this fear develops in childhood.

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disability and a difference. We need to find ways of alleviating the disability while respecting and valuing the difference.’ (Baron-Cohen, S. Quoted in Solomon, *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*. P. 282.) Those who support the neurodiversity approach have pointed out that people with a number of different named conditions, including autism, dyslexia and ADHD, can have gifts and strengths, some of which would not be present if they did not have those conditions.<sup>662</sup> Instead of following the medical model and treating such conditions as problems to be solved, Armstrong advocates the use of more positive language which concentrates on what people can do rather than what they cannot. This approach leads to identifying the most suitable niche for a person with unusual abilities, as well as finding the best means to support them. He points out that, for example, some computer software companies prefer to employ those with Asperger’s syndrome since they are better at testing new software than people described as neurotypical. He also warns of the danger of pre-natal screening if this leads to the elimination of neurodiverse people from the gene pool.

<sup>663</sup> Vanier, *Becoming Human*. p 50.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid. p 60-61.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid. p 61.



When the message comes across that we are loved, this can be transforming, as Vanier explains.

When I discover that I am accepted and loved as a person, with my strengths and weaknesses, when I discover that I carry within myself a secret, the secret of my uniqueness, then I can begin to open up to others and respect their secret. The fear of others begins to dissolve; inclusion, friendship, and a feeling of brotherhood/sisterhood begins to emerge.<sup>666</sup>

The secret which Vanier speaks of here links to Augustine's idea of the seed.<sup>667</sup> What Augustine calls a seed, and Vanier calls a secret, Sen calls a capability. Sen explains

A person's "capability" refers to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve. Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles).<sup>668</sup>

Looking at capabilities in this way requires one to consider what a person can do and what options they have to do other things. Those alternative possibilities, those things that cannot be achieved in this life, may, perhaps, be achieved in the next.

This model is unashamedly an idealistic one. It is based on the belief that every person is loved by God in the here and now of this life, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. It is based on the belief that every person can and should be able to fully participate in this world, regardless of the difficulties and challenges that their disabilities may entail. It requires us to acknowledge difference, even when that makes us feel uncomfortable. It makes us engage with disabilities in a new and creative way in spite of the fact that such engagement may be costly and, at times, impractical.

This model also requires that we throw away some of our cherished understanding of what perfection means. This is true not only of physical perfection, but also of perfect understanding. In the eschaton our present understanding will be far exceeded, so that our current knowledge will seem paltry by comparison. Even those who we think we know well in this life may surprise us in the eschaton, when we find out more about their hidden depths. We may even be surprised at what there is still to learn about our own identity, when we gain an insight into the person who God created us to be. We may, however, be disappointed, as

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid. p 82.

<sup>667</sup> See footnote 658 above. Augustine, *City of God*. Book 22, Ch. 14.

<sup>668</sup> A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*(OUP Oxford, 1999). p 75.

were the labourers in the vineyard, when we find out that our reward is not the one we hoped to receive.

#### 4 Conclusion

At the outset I asked these three questions. How will disability be interpreted in the eschaton? Will there be ramps (or tiers) in heaven? How will a disabled person be recognised in heaven, meaning, how will they be known if they no longer have the impairment which was an essential part of their identity on earth? In the eschaton disability will not be hidden, but it will not matter. Complete barrier removal will mean that disabled people will have complete equality with those who have no obvious disability because their disability has become irrelevant. If ramps are needed to facilitate this, then ramps will be provided, although the instant availability of strong-armed firemen who are no longer needed to put out fires, would be an acceptable alternative. Recognition will be achieved by the embodied history of everyone, a history which will include their impairments, in the form of scars which have become badges of honour, as with the martyrs.

Four possible models have been proposed as answers to the question of identity for disabled people in the eschaton. Deepening levels of complexity divide these models, yet they all contain one feature in common, that there is no certainty about what life in the kingdom of heaven will be like. What is also clear is that the things that are incomprehensible now, the questions that remain unanswered now, will one day be made clear. As Nouwen wrote, when he encountered the 15<sup>th</sup> station of the cross in Lourdes,

The resurrection of Jesus simplifies everything. Life is so complex. There are so many memories, events, possibilities. [...] But here, before the rolled-away stone, hope radiates, and all is very simple. I sense the truth of this simplicity: Jesus is risen.<sup>669</sup>

The simplicity of Nouwen's answer to life's questions should reassure us that we need not have any fear because people with disabilities will be recognised and known and loved in heaven just as the disciples were able to recognise the risen Jesus in their midst.

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<sup>669</sup> Henri JM Nouwen, "A Sudden Trip to Lourdes," *New Oxford Review* 57(1990). p 10.

## Chapter 5      Pastoral Implications

*The Church as the people of God can truly embody the living Christ among us only when the poor remain its most treasured part. Care for the poor, therefore, is much more than Christian charity. It is the essence of being the body of Christ.*<sup>670</sup>

### Introduction

Henri Nouwen has set a challenge to the Church. How is it possible to be the body of Christ by caring for the poor? In this particular chapter we will try to answer this question in the specific context of the poor who are disabled in some way.

One important aspect of this is that we should move away from paternalism and stop regarding people with disabilities as a problem to be solved. A paradigm shift is needed in order to search not for solutions but for gifts. The gifts that people with disabilities bring to a Church community must be recognised. The hidden depths of those who present themselves in challenging ways must be mined. When someone appears to come with the encumbrance of a disability we need to find ways to move beyond that outward appearance into the heart of their belovedness, the place where they can share the spirit of God who dwells within them. Just two themes will be used to explore this idea. One is the theme of gifts, which have already been mentioned and the second theme is that of families. Families of people with disabilities are a rich resource for the Churches, but they also need to be supported themselves. In this chapter some suggestions and recommendations will be made of how the Church can best support the families of those who have some kind of disability.

### 1. Recognition of Gifts

Science has given us the medical model of disability and rejection of this by the disabled community led to the development of the social model. Application of the social model to faith communities would be a useful step, perhaps, but something more radical than this is proposed here in the form of what we can call the gifts model of disability. The Catholic Church articulates this idea in the opening words of its Instruction, *Donum Vitae*, affirming that ‘The gift of life which God the Creator and Father has entrusted to man calls him to appreciate the inestimable value of what he has been given and to take responsibility for

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<sup>670</sup> Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*. Entry for October 30<sup>th</sup>.

it.<sup>671</sup> This is an important reminder that all life, including the lives of people who have disabilities, is a gift.

### 1.1 Origins of the gifts model

Traditional thinking about disability works like this: we see disabled people and we pity them, we feel sorry for them. As a result we are moved to do something to help them, if only to relieve our own feelings of distress. Charities are set up, we donate money to good causes, and we offer paternalistic solutions to the problem. We respond in ways that reflect the medical model of disability. This model regards disability as a problem of disease and therefore a problem to be solved by doing something to the sick person. Such a model allows the donor to walk away largely unchanged once their task is accomplished.

It has to be admitted that in the past the medical model did produce some benefits. Some of these include the existence of organisations which provide resources to tackle the problems of disability. Church organisations have often supported fund-raising initiatives to assist the major charities and many parishes make fund-raising for “the less fortunate” a feature of their social activities. Nevertheless there is a danger that people will think that their efforts to raise money are all that are required, thus ignoring the opportunity to benefit from much closer contact with people who have disabilities.

From disability studies comes the idea that disability is socially constructed. This means that the difficulties that someone encounters because they have some kind of impairment are not intrinsic to the person but are a product of their environment. A person who is unable to walk cannot climb stairs, but if there is a lift and they have a wheelchair they are not prevented from reaching their destination. A person who is deaf cannot hear the announcements on the Underground, but if the station announcements are displayed on an electronic screen then they are no more incapacitated than any other traveller. If the social model is accepted then it is tempting to believe that all that is needed is the provision of ramps for wheelchairs and hearing loops for the deaf and our churches will be doing all that they need to accommodate their disabled members.

In reality the situation is not quite so straightforward. Paternalistic attitudes, where church communities think they are doing good things by providing ramps into the church, but fail to

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<sup>671</sup> From the Introduction to *Donum Vitae*, The Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin.  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html)

welcome parents whose children are noisy into the community sometimes predominate. How many times does one encounter a person in a wheelchair taking a role in the liturgy? There is no reason why someone in a wheelchair should not be a minister of Holy Communion, or a Reader, and yet such a thing is extremely rare. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a man with a disability to be considered for the priesthood, although some priests with disabilities are able to exercise their ministry effectively.<sup>672</sup> When children with learning difficulties make too much noise their parents are often made to feel that it would be easier not to bring them to church. The result of this is that people with disabilities become invisible. Invisibility makes it impossible for parishioners to know that disabled people exist in their midst and therefore being able to benefit from their presence is ruled out. As Hans Reinders comments, ‘The times that I have asked ministers and pastors about members of their congregations who are disabled, the most frequent response is “We don’t have them”’.<sup>673</sup> Parishes need to find ways to uncover these hidden members of their community, actively seeking them out and welcoming them because of what they have to offer.

What I propose here is that we reject both of these models, the medical and the social, and adopt a completely different model, an approach which regards people with disabilities as gifted. The gifts model proposes that the gifts which disabled people bring can enrich the Church. These gifts can be shared. We can learn so much from these gifted people, these wise students in what St Benedict refers to as the school of the Lord’s service.<sup>674</sup> In this section I illustrate how, once we look for the gifts of disabled people, we can listen to them and observe what they have to teach us.

Perhaps the first person to suggest that disabled people are gifted was Jean Vanier. The message of L’Arche is that those who are weak, poor and vulnerable possess a treasure within them. They are gifted, but not in a way that is obvious and visible. In order to access those gifts we must ‘go down the ladder’ as Vanier calls it, in order to see the kingdom of God in our midst. We need to set aside our prejudices, overcome our pride in our own achievements, ignore the desire to ‘do good’ so that we ourselves will feel better. We need to be prepared to

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<sup>672</sup> There are priests who use wheelchairs, but this is due to infirmity which developed after ordination. A deafblind Redemptorist, Fr Cyril Axelrod and a deaf Jesuit, Fr Paul Fletcher, are both congenitally deaf, but there are those who would argue that deafness is not a disability. Many deaf people consider themselves minority language users, rather than disabled people. See C. Axelrod, *And the Journey Begins* (Douglas MacLean, 2005).

<sup>673</sup> Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*. p. 335.

<sup>674</sup> St Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Justin McCann (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976). p. 4.

feel pain because we cannot solve their problems, to feel frustration because we cannot understand their needs, to feel guilt, even, because they have not deserved this, and we are impotent. We need to allow ourselves to feel embarrassed, at times, because of our own riches and to feel angry because of the injustice that allows the uneven distribution of benefits.

## 1.2 The gift of teaching

One important gift which people with disabilities can offer is that they can teach those who come into contact with them about how to live together as a community. Here we can regard teaching as an opportunity for mutual growth, where the distinction between the teacher and the learner is blurred, because both are developing. Christella Buser has collected a number of small vignettes of life in L'Arche communities. The speakers are anonymous, but their stories are instructive. Here is an example from an un-named assistant who explains how core members were her teachers.

From my experience it's the core members who keep our community together. Buddy's joy, Tammy's noises, Susan's smiles, Rufus' secret handshake and Marian's singing mean family for me. They're the ones who love first, who accept first, who forgive first and who let go first. I came to L'Arche figuring I would be the teacher, but it was the core members who taught me about living as a community.<sup>675</sup>

Through their weakness and vulnerability, through their lack of words, these gifted people offer a deeper way of relating to others which brings surprising benefits to those who are open to receive such learning. Parishes who welcome disabled people into their midst, who actively strive to meet their needs, will be amply rewarded by discoveries such as these. Working together to assist those who need barriers to their participation removed will demonstrate to the community how to love and how to live together as brothers and sisters.

Henri Nouwen, in speaking of Adam, the profoundly disabled man he cared for in L'Arche Daybreak, describes him as 'my counsellor, my teacher, and my guide, who could never say a word to me but taught me more than any book, professor, or spiritual director.'<sup>676</sup> Nouwen, who before this time had been a professor at Yale and Harvard, astonished his former colleagues when he renounced the life of an academic in order to be taught by men like Adam.

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<sup>675</sup> C. Buser, *Flowers from the Ark: True Stories from the Homes of L'Arche* (Paulist Press, 1996). pp. 84-5.

<sup>676</sup> Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved*. p. 87.

Teaching can be a form of evangelisation, as can be seen when Vanier, who often draws parallels between the poor and people with disabilities, talks about the poor:

The poor reveal, to those who come to be with them, how to live compassionately on the level of the heart. They evangelize us. They show us the way of the beatitudes. A gradual transformation takes place in the hearts of those who come to live with them, as they discover their own poverty. They discover that the good news of Jesus is announced, not to those who serve the poor, but to those who are themselves poor.<sup>677</sup>

Vanier reminds us that we are all poor in some sense and that we can all feel a sense of exclusion and isolation. People with disabilities can reach out across that isolation and exclusion and bring people together into community. This requires careful attention to what the people with disabilities are trying to teach us. It is important to go beyond merely saying “we are all disabled”, however. We are called to recognise our own needs, our own poverty, our own dependence on God. This requires an approach to people with disabilities that looks to them for guidance and support, that asks for information about what they need, and that is always willing to learn from what they can teach, because our knowledge is never complete, and there are always more truths to discover.

Reimer, who studied the relationships between core members and the carer who worked with them, describes something which happened in the middle of interviewing an assistant named Sherry with David, a man who particularly enjoys doing complicated jigsaw puzzles.

Sherry turns her attention to David, tenderly conversing in a muted whisper. Their easy love and familiarity are elements of an unexpected communion. In the economy of the moment they are my teachers. [...] The communion sacrament is the free gift of compassionate love found in broken fragments miraculously reconstituted through the intuition and generosity of the poor.<sup>678</sup>

What this indicates is how uncomplicated it can be to find worthwhile activities whereby something profound can happen. Simply by indulging David in his hobby of doing jigsaw puzzles allows an interaction to take place which is so impressive that it demands vocabulary like ‘communion sacrament’ to adequately describe it. For parishes, it would seem not too difficult to offer opportunities like this for people with learning disabilities to come together from time to time.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Vanier, *Heart of L'Arche*. p. 47.

<sup>678</sup> Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. p. 77.

<sup>679</sup> Such groups do exist, such as the Saturday Clubs run by the outreach team at St Joseph's Pastoral Centre, in Hendon, North London. Their website is <http://www.stjoseph.org.uk/>

### 1.3 Revealing truth

People with disabilities have another gift, which is an extension of the gift of teaching, one of being able to reveal truth to others, allowing them to discover things they did not know before, or allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of things they already partially knew. An example of this is seen when those who start out working with people with disabilities expect that they will be the givers. It is a surprise, therefore, to discover that they will be on the receiving end of grace and blessings. On a visit to a L'Arche community in Montreal, Ian Brown met a religious sister who cares for a woman called Isabelle, who is only able to communicate by rolling her eyes up for yes and down for no. This is the nun's account of what working with Isabelle taught her.

[The] first time I met someone with a disability [...] was in a psychiatric hospital. And it was someone very fragile. It called up a tenderness in me that surprised me, that came out of me through that person. And I interpret that tenderness, which was so immense, as coming from something bigger than me. And that's what makes me stay here, that moment, that tenderness. Isabelle needs that. And that's why she's here. It was her who showed me the difference between we who choose and a person who can't choose.<sup>680</sup>

This religious sister discovered something which she recognised came from God and which made her able to do more than she realised. She had the option of returning to her community but chose to stay and work at L'Arche because of blessings like this. Another example of this comes from an anonymous assistant who explains how caring for a profoundly disabled person offers her moments of grace and revelation.

I have the great fortune from time to time to waken Rosie, bathe her and feed her breakfast. The experience is always moving. After preparing her bath, I go into Rosie's room and call her. Her body is peaceful. Her beautiful eyes open with a look of tenderness and light. For me, it is like being in the presence of an angel. I give thanks for the opportunity to receive this light that is so freely given.<sup>681</sup>

The key message here is about the privilege and blessing of caring for severely disabled people. Such blessings are a kind of therapy for the recipient, and as mentioned previously, these come as a surprise to the people who thought they were going to be the ones giving something to others.

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<sup>680</sup> Brown, *The Boy in the Moon: A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son*. p 193 - 194.

<sup>681</sup> Buser, *Flowers from the Ark: True Stories from the Homes of L'Arche*. pp 29-30.



This same idea of people with disabilities being revealers of truth, or channels of God's grace can also be found in Henri Nouwen's introduction to de Vinck's book about his brother Oliver:

These people are God's messengers, they are the divine instruments of God's healing presence, they are the ones who bring truth to a society full of lies, light into the darkness and life into a death-oriented world. Everything this book reveals seems contrary to common sense. How can a young man who cannot see, walk, talk, feed himself or communicate in any way and who is on his back in his bed until he dies at the age of thirty – how can such a person be the most life-giving presence in the family?<sup>682</sup>

This also indicates how counter-intuitive it seems to most people that someone who has so many limitations can be such a powerful means of giving wisdom to others, yet this is what happens when the truth is revealed through people who do not resist the way God manifests himself through their lives.

Another kind of revelation happened to the researcher Kevin Reimer, who conducted an ethnographic study of L'Arche in the USA. Reimer explains how a ritual which happens in L'Arche caused him to question one of his previous ideas about the ability of people with intellectual impairment. He, an experienced teacher, is given new lessons by the people he has come to study.

Religious concepts are commonly understood to be symbolic. That is, they require the capacity for abstract thinking. On their own, Madeleine and Scully [two core members of L'Arche] should not be able mentally to connect the candle with abstractions like healing and gratitude. But they do. To be more precise, they share in a group understanding which helps create and sustain these connections.<sup>683</sup>

This tells us that for people with disabilities their intellectual disadvantage does not prevent them from participating fully in rituals and more importantly they are able to appreciate the presence of God in the same way as anyone with higher intellectual abilities. Indeed, perhaps they are even more able to appreciate and respond to the presence of God than those who intellectualise their spiritual experiences. One might even say that the two people Reimer has described find it easier to access the divine by virtue of their more immediate connectedness which does not become trapped in the vocabulary of abstractions. By stopping to analyse and reflect on a spiritual experience there is a danger that we miss the beauty of the moment. For

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<sup>682</sup> Introduction, written by Henri Nouwen. C. De Vinck, *The Power of the Powerless* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1988). pp xvi-xvii.

<sup>683</sup> Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. pp 29-30.

the core members like Madeleine and Scully the spiritual journey is more straightforward and gains in clarity whatever it might lack in “cognitive depth”.

This same idea, that intellectual impairment can allow a clearer vision of God, is something Vanier has also identified when he talks about the gift of prophecy which can be found in the people he works with in L’Arche. Vanier considers that the weak, vulnerable people who are the core members of L’Arche have been chosen by God for a prophetic task.

People who have highly developed intellects often try to reach God through their minds and thoughts. People who have limited intelligence are more open to a simple presence, a heart-to-heart relationship of communion and love. They receive God in the peace of their hearts, although they are unable to put their experience into words.<sup>684</sup>

Vanier makes it clear that those with the most able minds are paradoxically disabled by their intellect when it comes to perceiving the presence of God. The intellectual person is distracted, perhaps, by the words and thoughts while the seemingly simple minded person has direct access to God. This is reminiscent of the gospels where Jesus speaks of hiding things from the learned and revealing them to children. (Matt 11:25, Lk 10:21) Vanier illustrates this when talking about Armando who ‘has a therapeutic influence on everyone in the community.’<sup>685</sup> The influence of a child like Armando is remarkable because it is in such contrast with conventional ideas of power. The idea that weak people can exercise power is explored by the mother of Oliver who wrote an account of what it was like to care for him in the book which was so aptly entitled *The Power of the Powerless*.

Oliver was always a “hopeless” case, yet he was such a precious gift for our whole family. “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” (1 Cor 1:27) This child had no *apparent* usefulness or meaning, and the “world” would reject him as an unproductive burden. But he was a holy innocent, a child of light. Looking at him, I saw the power of powerlessness. His total helplessness speaks to our deepest hearts, calls us not merely to pious emotions but to service. Through this child I felt bound to Christ crucified – yes, and also to all those who suffer in the world. While caring for Oliver, I also felt that I ministered, in some mysterious way, to all my unknown brothers and sisters who were, and are, grieving and in pain throughout the world. So, through Oliver, I learned the deepest meaning of compassion. I have made my peace with the coming of Oliver’s death. I cannot see it as a tragedy. I know that the child who lived in apparent void and darkness sees

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<sup>684</sup> Vanier, *Heart of L’Arche*, p 39.

<sup>685</sup> Buser, *Flowers from the Ark: True Stories from the Homes of L’Arche*, p. 72. Armando featured in Chapter 2, footnote 345.

God, lives forever in health, beauty and light. Here on earth, he was loved. His presence among us was a mysterious sign of that peace the world cannot give.<sup>686</sup>

Here is a mother who recognises the gift her son has given her and who can be thankful for what she has learnt from his life. Oliver drew forth from her good qualities which she might not have felt capable of generating on her own.

Another paradox is found when one considers how the L'Arche core members show even more compassionate love to those who care for them than their carers do for them. By trusting in those who care for them, even when their past may have included abuse, they bring about change and healing in those carers. There are two possible interpretations for this, says Reimer. One answer could be that the assistants are being too romantic and idealistic in their interpretations, exaggerating the effects the core members have on them. This could happen because people have sacrificed a better paid job and status in order to work with those who have severe disabilities. In order to justify having made such a sacrifice, the assistants weave stories of healing and redemption into their explanations. Alternatively it could be that social scientists have underestimated the potential of people with disabilities to convey complex moral ideas, to have what Reimer calls 'moral maturity'.

Moral maturity in L'Arche is framed by historical figures like Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. These are champions of virtue and character. The moral language of L'Arche, and the practices which inform it, are some miles away from the scientific mainstream.<sup>687</sup>

So for Reimer the social scientists have ignored something which lies outside what might be called the measurable limits of human behaviour. The measurement of moral reasoning has traditionally been carried out by asking people questions about moral dilemmas.<sup>688</sup> Such scenarios require the ability to understand those stories and to articulate theoretical constructs, abilities that may well elude the people who have been described in this chapter. Instead core members in L'Arche are living witnesses of the power of the highest virtues of love, compassion, generosity of spirit and trust. In L'Arche, argues Reimer, moral behaviour is under the influence of intuition, rather than intellectual thought. Intuition links somehow with Augustine's third level of vision, that abstract level of 'seeing' which goes beyond what the physical eyes can take in and is more than imagination. This has been discussed earlier in

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<sup>686</sup> De Vinck, *The Power of the Powerless*. pp 87-88. This extract from the book was from an article written by Oliver's mother.

<sup>687</sup> Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. p 108.

<sup>688</sup> The most famous of these are the stories used by Kohlberg. See Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 56, no. 10 (1975).

Chapter 2. The point here is that something too deep for words can still be felt and understood and, as has been mentioned earlier, that in some cases those who seem to be most cognitively challenged can ‘see’ such things more clearly than those whose minds are cluttered with intellectual ideas.

#### 1.4 Spiritual Gifts

There are traditionally a number of gifts of the Holy Spirit, although different sources name different gifts. Isaiah lists six gifts; wisdom, understanding, counsel, might (sometimes called fortitude), knowledge and fear of the Lord, (Is 11:1-2) and to this the Catholic Church adds piety.<sup>689</sup> The well-known triad of ‘faith, hope and charity’ (1 Cor 13:13) are described by the Catholic Church as theological virtues, to which are added the three fruits of charity; joy, peace and mercy.<sup>690</sup> The traditional twelve fruits of the spirit, are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.<sup>691</sup> For the purpose of this section I will refer to any of these gifts, virtues or fruits, since they are all in one way or another relevant valued qualities for Christian life. It is interesting to see how Christopher De Vinck identifies several of these gifts which came to his family as they cared for his brother Oliver.

Oliver was never able to do anything in that sense of the word. He was virtually paralyzed, but still he did so much for each one of us. He evoked the best *love* that was in us. He helped us to grow in the virtues of devotion, *wisdom*, perseverance, *kindness*, *patience* and *fidelity*. Without doing anything, Oliver made all of us better human beings. He taught us that the importance of service is not exclusively in doing for others but in allowing them to do for us. The meek and humble of heart do all of us a service when they call us to respond in love.<sup>692</sup>

Oliver did two things; he demonstrated the gifts of the spirit and he also drew out those spiritual gifts from those around him. In this way he shows what is possible if people are prepared to learn from those like Oliver. People who are profoundly disabled can use their gift for teaching others, drawing out of them the kind of tenderness and compassion that Oliver’s brother describes. This educative power has also been described by others, such as Henri Nouwen when talking about Adam, a man who had similar limitations to those of Oliver. Nouwen recognised that the special gift that Adam had, taught him both how to *be* vulnerable and how to *accept* his vulnerability.

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<sup>689</sup> Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. #1831.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid. #1813.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid. #1832. Nine of these twelve can be found in Gal 5:22-23.

<sup>692</sup> De Vinck, *The Power of the Powerless*. pp 105-6. The italics have been added to emphasise the gifts.

I believe that God sent Adam as God sent Jesus, to be an instrument of grace, a source of healing, a cause of new joy. He was so whole, so peaceful, silent, breathing heavily, fidgeting with his fingers, and never aware of how special he was.<sup>693</sup>

As we have seen in other examples, this illustrates the ability possessed by severely disabled people to both demonstrate and draw out virtues from people around them. This process can sometimes lead to a significant change, or transformation, for the recipients, and this is the subject of the following section.

### 1.5 Transformations

Sometimes the effect of being with someone with a disability is so profound that the experience can only be described in terms of a transformation for the person who experiences it. Such transformation moments are unexpected and leave a lasting impression. The recipient is sometimes surprised because they have received something valuable in a time and place when they expected to be the giver, rather than the receiver, of care and support. At other times the person who experiences transformation is given an unexpected insight into the life of the person who has a disability and this encourages them so that they can continue to support that person and their needs.

Ian Brown has written a father's account of the life of his son, Walker, who has Cardio-Facio-Cutaneous Syndrome (CFC), an extremely rare genetic condition which causes a variety of symptoms, including cognitive delay. Shortly before Walker was two years old he was assessed by a paediatrician who specialises in such cases. Walker was diagnosed as being moderately delayed.

The doctor judged Walker's overall development to be at the ten-month level. Ten months. Less than half his age. "As he gets older, of course, the differences will become more noticeable."

[The doctor] turned to me. "Do you have any more questions?"

"Just one. We rented a cottage this summer for the first time, north of Toronto. It's a very remote place, very quiet. An island, no one around but us. Walker seems to love it. It changes him, calms him. It means a lot to me, that place, and how it changes him. Will I ever be able to explain all that to him?"

[The doctor] shook his head. "Not rationally, probably not. But" – he stopped, thought – "it sounds like he already understands it." Another pause. "The Buddhists say the way to enlightenment, to pure being, is by getting your mind out of the way. I'm not trying to be trite, but Walker already knows how to do that. He is pure being. He may be developmentally delayed, or moderately retarded, but in that way, he's already miles ahead of most of us."

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<sup>693</sup> Nouwen and Anderson, *Adam, God's Beloved*. p 69.

That was the first time someone suggested Walker had a gift the rest of us didn't.<sup>694</sup>

Walker has a gift which allows him to experience something which is hidden for most people, and hearing this from the doctor brought about a transformation for Walker's father who was then able to appreciate something positive in the face of so many difficulties which accompany his son's life and the life of his family. This allows Brown to cope better with Walker's disability and gives him more understanding of his son's needs. It also allows him to be open to receive other moments of insight when he recognises the different world that Walker inhabits.<sup>695</sup>

One L'Arche assistant reports a conversation she had with Trent, a core member, while she was bathing him when he asks 'You're my friend, right?' She is stunned because she realises that in spite of all the sufferings Trent has endured over the course of his life he is still able to trust someone enough to ask them for friendship.

I realized that I was in a transforming moment, knowing that I'm more broken than Trent. I could not be this vulnerable. I thought that I was being authentic but realized he was teaching me something that I hadn't learned. God was really present in that moment. That is when I could say that I didn't choose L'Arche but L'Arche has chosen me. That's our spirituality.<sup>696</sup>

This 'transforming moment' led Reimer to make his own discovery and he comments on how this story had a profound effect on him, challenging his previously held academic thinking on the subject of compassion. Instead of describing compassion in terms of psychological views of altruism, or theological discussions about the love of God, he realises that 'Compassionate love was about the other person who makes relationship possible, about security and trust liberating each individual to learn about the other more completely.'<sup>697</sup> It is no coincidence that Reimer, a Professor of Psychology, chose to call the chapter in which this discovery appears 'The Transforming Moment' since this was such a turning-point in his own thinking, and one which arose from observing an encounter between an assistant and a man who has a mental age of about five years. The ingredients for this deeply significant discovery were the simple ones of security and trust which had been established between the two participants. By

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<sup>694</sup> Brown, *The Boy in the Moon: A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son*. p 68.

<sup>695</sup> Some of the insights are very simple yet poignant. Having discussed the way caring for a disabled child puts enormous strains on a marriage, estimating that between 60 and 80 percent of such marriages end in divorce, Brown then says simply, 'Mostly we forgive each other. Walker taught us how to do that.' *ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>696</sup> Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. p 54.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.* p 55.

providing opportunities where people can share such trust church communities will be creating a place where compassionate love can flourish.

## 2. Pastoral Practice

It is crucial to listen to the stories of people with disabilities. Sometimes these stories will be told by their families and their carers who have a key role to play in making sure that the world of those with disabilities is not hidden from the public domain. Ethical issues arise relating to pre-natal screening and these are discussed in the second section. Finally the topic of celebration explores ways in which people with disabilities can bring enrichment to worship.

### 2.1 Supporting Families

When Jesus was asked about the man who was born blind he answers enigmatically that it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.<sup>698</sup> What does this mean in practical terms for the parents of a child with Autism, or with Down's Syndrome, or any other cognitive impairment? Can those parents really believe that their child can manifest the works of God? How can we help those parents to understand and appreciate the particular part their child can play in revealing the glory of God to others? These are the kind of questions that need to be considered, that need to be answered, however tentatively, if we are to try to recognise the treasure that lies within that disabled child. It is not just parents who need support, of course, but siblings too, because they have their stories and their messages to give to the rest of the world, the world of typical people who need to hear about the extraordinary world of the atypical.

Just as disabled people themselves have much to teach us, so do those who are close to them, especially their parents, in the case of children who are disabled from birth. Parents who find themselves caring for a child with disabilities are thrust into an unknown world where the things they need to learn are totally unexpected. These are uncharted waters, not covered in the standard manuals of parenting. Siblings are also influenced by the presence of a disabled brother or sister and in this section we will hear from two such brothers who have both written about their disabled brothers and what they have learnt from them.<sup>699</sup> This section

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<sup>698</sup> As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:1-3)

<sup>699</sup> There are many accounts written by parents about their disabled children. In addition to those cited here I can recommend Young, *Face to Face : A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering*. and S. Barton, *Living with*

draws on some first hand accounts which have much to teach us about the blessings that disabled people bring to those who care for them.

Ian Brown, the father of Walker whose case was described above, visited parents of other children with the same condition<sup>700</sup> as his son. The mother of two daughters with CFC said “My little girls are the greatest example of selflessness and good nature that I know.”<sup>701</sup> The consolation that parents find in the face of the many difficulties they experience can come in the form of a realisation that their child has qualities which other people lack, or that their qualities are in greater abundance than in typical children.

As a theologian, Yong writes about Gregory of Nyssa’s idea of Epectasis, and suggests that we will all be constantly evolving as we grow closer and closer to God. In the eschaton ‘people with Down Syndrome will also continually increase in goodness, knowledge, and love, vis-à-vis both the communion of saints and the triune God, all of which will have implications for their bodily and our corporate transformation as well.’<sup>702</sup> He cites Walls who suggests that even though people with disabilities will be healed in heaven, they will retain the memories of their impairments and of the things that their struggles taught them. This also will be true of those who cared for them, since ‘The extra sacrifices of kindness and patience given on behalf of handicapped persons also shape the identity of those who offer them in faith and love and will remain a part of their history.’<sup>703</sup> For parents their struggles and challenges will be recognised in the eschaton, a place where the memory of what they have endured will no longer cause pain, but be acknowledged along with all their earthly suffering and turned into a blessing.

## 2.2 Witness to the wider society

One ethical debate which features quite frequently in discussions about disability is that which surrounds the question of pre-natal testing for genetic disorders.<sup>704</sup> It is important at

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Jonathan(Watkins Publishing, 2012). Solomon, *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity.*, from which some material has been taken also includes a wealth of material from interviews Solomon conducted with parents of children with a wide variety of different conditions.

<sup>700</sup> For further information about CFC, the website <http://www.cfcsyndrome.org/> is particularly useful.

<sup>701</sup> Brown, *The Boy in the Moon: A Father's Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son.* p 144.

<sup>702</sup> Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity.* p 283.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid. p. 284 quoting from Jerry Walls, *Heaven* p. 112.

<sup>704</sup> Books which include discussions of this topic include L.J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*(Verso, 1995)., Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader.*, Davis, *Bending over Backwards : Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions.*, C. Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture*(University of Michigan Press, 2007)., Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs.*, Solomon, *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity.*, as well as Brown, cited below.



this point to listen to the voices of parents of disabled children on this subject. In a conversation with his wife, Brown asks her

“What do you think the world would be like without people like Walker – without kids like him, I mean, kids who have real setbacks?” This is not so unreal a possibility, given the sophistication of prenatal testing.

“A world where there were only masters of the universe would be like Sparta. It would not be a kind country. It would be a cruel place.”<sup>705</sup>

The implications of this are that however challenging it is to care for a child with a severe disability, the parents of such children, who must know more than anyone how hard that task can be are not keen advocates of the removal from society of such children as theirs. In each individual case they would want a cure for their child, but some parents are nevertheless able to see that this is, in some ways, a selfish wish, prompted by their own needs. Asking the question about whether scientists should try to find a cure for Down’s Syndrome produces a number of different views. Some think that merely talking of a cure implies that those who have Down’s Syndrome are not valuable. Certainly pre-natal screening in order to abort foetuses with Down’s Syndrome is a contested area. One father had this to say on the subject:

If I could have David who he is but not have Down syndrome? [...] I would do it in a minute. [...] But the diversity of human beings makes the world a better place, and if everyone with Down syndrome were cured, it would be a real loss. The personal wish and the social wish are in opposition. The question is whether we collectively learn more than we hurt.<sup>706</sup>

David’s mother echoes this view, agreeing that for his sake she would like a cure.

For David, I’d cure it in an instant; but for us, I wouldn’t exchange these experiences for anything. They’ve made us who we are, and who we are is so much better than who we would have been otherwise.<sup>707</sup>

This mother can recognise that she has benefitted from having a son with a disability and this illustrates how the issue of pre-natal screening is a complex one. The difficulty is explained by Temple Grandin, herself someone with Autism, who says

if you got rid of all the autism genetics, you’d get rid of scientists, musicians, mathematicians, and all you’d have left is dried-up bureaucrats. I see a picture in my mind of the cavemen talking around the campfire, and off in the corner, there’s the

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<sup>705</sup> Brown, *The Boy in the Moon: A Father’s Journey to Understand His Extraordinary Son*. p. 181.

<sup>706</sup> Solomon, *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*. p. 219.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid. p. 219.

Aspie guy, and he's chipping the first stone spear, figuring out how to tie it to a stick, cutting some animal sinews to do it. Social people don't make technology.<sup>708</sup>

If Grandin is correct then people with disabilities are just as necessary to society as people who do not have any obvious form of impairment. Furthermore disabled people themselves (and their families) are often the best advocates for alternatives to pre-natal screening which leads to abortion. The Catholic Church in particular, but any Christians who are opposed to abortion, would do well to harness the powerful and authoritative voices of these advocates when campaigning against abortion, even in cases where the foetus is known to have a genetically caused condition that would limit their life. It is, however, essential for the Church to continue to support such families once their children are born. Furthermore, as Stanley Hauerwas argues when challenging the idea of preventing children with disabilities from being born, 'The issue is not whether retarded children can serve a human good, but whether we should be the kind of people, the kind of parents and communities that can receive, even welcome, them into our midst in a manner that allows them to flourish.'<sup>709</sup> This, then, is the challenge for the Church, to be those welcoming communities who allow disabled people to prosper and thrive as they play their part in the life of the community.

### 2.3 Celebrating difference and diversity

In this section we can try to consider what it means for a child with a disability to reveal the works of God. It is in communal acts of worship that the opportunity can arise for people with disabilities to come into the public sphere and for their gifts to be recognised. This is not the only place where this can happen, of course, but it is an important place. If we cannot accept people with disabilities in acts of worship then we will be missing out on the opportunity for God's works to be shown.

Reimer describes how a ritual involving passing round a lighted candle is used each evening after dinner in L'Arche homes. Each person responds in their own way; some with a prayer or a song, some in silence, some with silent tears, some with gestures and signs. Reimer suggests that it is the group nature of the candle ritual that is most important, because together the group is able to achieve more than any individual might alone. He compares a L'Arche community to a US Navy ship coming into harbour, a task which requires a team of six navigators to achieve successfully. This is about finding meaning and solving a problem,

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<sup>708</sup> Temple Grandin in *ibid.* p. 283. Aspie is the name some people on the Autistic spectrum give themselves, being a shortened form of Asperger's.

<sup>709</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church.* p. 167.

something which requires more than one individual to achieve. He talks about sharing of religious meanings as a way of dealing with problems. 'For many core members and assistants, exchange between meaning and problem solving is understood as a spiritual journey. This path is both individual and shared with the L'Arche community.'<sup>710</sup> If he is correct, and religious ritual does assist in problem solving, then surely religious acts are not just luxuries, but a necessity for human flourishing. It is as though the whole is greater than the sum of the parts because through the medium of religious ritual people can express ideas and acquire meaning which would otherwise be beyond their grasp. Aided by religious ritual and meaning we can achieve greater things. It is as if religion enables people to attain goals which would not be possible left to their own devices, as if proving that God helps us to achieve more than we could ever hope to alone.

Could it be that the very fact that they lack words enables such people to reach out with senses that go beyond words? If this is the case, perhaps it is not words that we need to work with people with disabilities, but actions. A very practical book from Brett Webb-Mitchell contains some suggestions about how to welcome people with disabilities into faith communities. The author has worked as a music therapist, special education teacher and professor at Duke Divinity School. He describes many varied practical situations from his own pastoral experience. He uses the image of guests invited to a banquet to illustrate the ideas of this book. People with special educational needs are invited to the banquet and their hosts try to make them welcome. The host, however, has the potential to become the guest, when the invited guests are able to teach their host useful lessons. He tells the story of a girl called Sal who surprised him with her accomplished signing of a song which she must have learnt before coming to live in the institution where he worked. Sal had learnt all the hand signs for that song and transformed it for the whole group from just an ordinary song into an extraordinary means of communication for the whole group.<sup>711</sup> What is important is the way student and teacher share together. 'It is in the sharing of stories, both human and sacred, that our faith, and our knowledge of God, is shaped and nurtured and we discover identity and belonging in the midst of God's love.'<sup>712</sup> This is a relationship where the distinction between pupil and teacher becomes blurred as each learns from the other.

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<sup>710</sup> Reimer, *Living L'Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability*. p. 40.

<sup>711</sup> B. Webb-Mitchell, *Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities into the Church*(Crossroads, 1994). p. 132.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid. p. 153.

When discussing Rowan Williams' ideas on identity in Chapter 4 the observation was made that identity is something which is given, not something which depends on our own efforts. The implication of this is that when children are being prepared to receive the sacraments for the first time the gifts they will receive in Holy Communion or Confirmation do not depend on their intellectual understanding of what they are receiving. Sometimes parents of children with learning difficulties are reluctant to arrange for their children to receive these sacraments because they argue that the child will not understand what is happening. Whilst it is important for children to receive adequate preparation for the sacraments and appropriate catechesis, there is no theological reason why they should be barred or prevented from receiving something because they do not understand. Since all sacraments are a mystery, no-one can say that they fully understand them. If we did not allow reception of the sacraments to those who do not fully understand what they are receiving then no-one would be given Holy Communion or Confirmation. The sacraments bestow a gift on the recipient which is not dependent on the receiver, but the gift of God, the giver.

In some cases parents of children with disabilities are able to rejoice over their child, as in the example given by Amos Yong, who writes about his brother, Mark, who has Down's Syndrome. Yong talks about the way God has used Mark's life to reach out to others.

Mom believes Mark's life has been a conduit for the grace of God to be manifest to others. What else is this than the saving work of God expressed in the life of an individual who is otherwise dismissed and marginalized according to the norms of this world? When I asked Mark what it meant to him that Jesus was his saviour, he answered, "He is my best friend."<sup>713</sup>

When we see people living in poverty we can often react in the same way as I described when witnessing disability. We feel sorry but helpless. When Jesus felt sorry for someone, it was the rich young man. He did not feel sorry for the poor, he said that the poor would always be there. So what should our reaction to the poverty of disability be? If the poor and disabled will always be with us, perhaps it is more helpful to see what can be done to include them in society. This is the view taken by some sociologists and economists, that poverty is a form of social exclusion.<sup>714</sup> Disabled people are often excluded, against their will, from full participation in society and in the Church. Instead of feeling sorry and helpless in the face of

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<sup>713</sup> Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. p. 229.

<sup>714</sup> There are a number of researchers working in this area. Useful sources include A.S. Bhalla and F. Lapeyre, *Poverty and Exclusion in a Global World, Second Edition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)., A. Sen, *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Scrutiny* (Critical Quest, 2004)., and P. Townsend and D. Gordon, *World Poverty: New Policies to Defeat an Old Enemy* (Policy Press, 2002).

poverty, a more positive approach is to look for ways to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of the Church. When disabled people are encouraged to participate their presence can be a powerful witness.

A Jesuit priest who spent some time working in a L'Arche community in Canada described a profound experience when he was celebrating Mass on Pentecost Sunday with just two core members and one other assistant. He describes holding a child called Vincent while he was celebrating the Mass.

At the consecration of the bread something happened inside me. It's hard to explain. I was holding the bread in my right hand and I said the words, "This is my body..." Right then I was holding Vincent in my left, and it seemed that Jesus was telling me, "This is my body..." It made a perfect circle, the same reality, the same Presence. Vincent's body, so broken and poor, was also the broken body of Jesus. I held both in my hands, and I knew both of them were sacred.<sup>715</sup>

The priest explains how this experience changed his view of those broken bodies of the children in that community. From then on he felt that their bodies were sacred, that they held within them a mystery, just as the Eucharistic bread conceals the sacred presence of Christ. He likens Vincent to the mustard seed, something very small and insignificant and yet containing great power and strength, the power to change lives and influence many people. The voices of these L'Arche prophets need to be heard so that the Church can recognise the treasure that is stored inside the broken bodies of her disabled members. Here they are, here and now, patiently waiting to reveal to us the eschaton, our heavenly home.

This story illustrates how important it is for people with disabilities to be seen in liturgical celebrations. When they are hidden away in corners, or kept out of sight the rest of the congregation miss such opportunities to witness the sacred. Anyone who has attended a liturgical celebration in Lourdes will know how powerfully the *malades*<sup>716</sup> bring the messages of this chapter, the messages of transformation and power in weakness, home to those who are present. Sometimes it is in tiny actions of kindness, offering someone a cup of water, helping someone to hold their service booklet, that the gospel message is made visible. Sometimes greater ceremonial images are an occasion for revelation of the works of God.

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<sup>715</sup> Buser, *Flowers from the Ark: True Stories from the Homes of L'Arche*. pp. 80-81.

<sup>716</sup> The pilgrims known as *malades*, the French word for the sick, are given particular priorities in Lourdes, being allowed to 'jump the queue' to enter the Grotto or the baths, and in general being welcomed as the most important people on the pilgrimage.

## Conclusion

Inevitably this chapter raises some questions which have not been fully answered. The nature of the research has been theoretical, drawing on published evidence of practical research, but no attempt has been made to collect first-hand accounts from people with disabilities or from Church communities. Such research would have required ethical approval and this can be difficult to obtain. When working with people who have limited cognitive ability it is always difficult to establish whether they can give informed consent to take part in research. In the future I hope that others working in this field will be able to investigate some of these questions by first-hand, on-the-ground research.

There is also a need for more research into the needs of parents of children who are severely disabled. Parishes, too, need to ask these parents what their needs are and how the church can support them better. There are organisations and groups which offer support and advocacy<sup>717</sup>, but more could still be done. L'Arche is also a movement which offers ideas, particularly for liturgical celebrations. Nevertheless there are still far too many people who feel excluded from the life of the Church because they are not welcomed, or because the church communities are unwilling to try to meet their needs. This is a loss for the people with disabilities, but more importantly it is a loss for the church community itself who are ignoring a rich source of joy and blessings.

## Epilogue

*Silence. In silence he joined with us in anticipation. Bread and wine. Body and blood. No one would turn him away. He was, he knew, God's child. It did not matter, he understood, if others thought he should not be fed at the table. He was here, now. Home, finally. His tongue, the one slightly too long, came out of his mouth. Wine soaked bread touched the tip. He shuddered completely full of the mystery. His hands touched his lips. Communion as an act of the senses. Communion as a sensuous act. Taste, touch—an intimate joining of two loves, two lives. No longer bread. No longer wine. More than body. More than blood. Complete, it's possible to be complete! We*

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<sup>717</sup> One example is St Joseph's Pastoral Centre, in the Archdiocese of Westminster. 'Working in the Archdiocese for thirty years, St. Joseph's Pastoral Centre is entrusted with the support of people with learning disabilities, their families and friends.' From the website <http://www.stjoseph.org.uk/about-us/index.html>. Accessed 22.11.13.

*are not alone. We live in God's world. A human heart beating in rhythm with divine love.*<sup>718</sup>

Thinking about heaven has led me to dream of the future. It is inevitable that some of the time my reflections are about a place none of us has ever seen, a place that no-one can describe from first-hand experience, a place we can only dream about. But I also dream about a future that is tangible, a future here on this earth, in this world, not in the next. In my dream people who have disabilities are fully integrated into society and that includes the community that we call church. In this church we have a place for everyone, able bodied and impaired, mentally alert and intellectually limited. In this church people are valued for the gifts they bring, and they are all willing to try to communicate to each other the mystery of divine love. In this church every member has the courage and confidence to declare that they are beloved sons and daughters of the Father. Even more than this, we will be able to welcome those outside the church, by being true evangelists, sharing the joy of the Gospel with our brothers and sisters, with or without disabilities, through our loving actions towards each other. Before we worry about what the eschaton will be like, we need to build the kingdom on earth. In the words of Pope Francis,

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives, it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.<sup>719</sup>

If we can be brave enough to reach out to embrace those with disabilities, especially those with learning disabilities, then we will be able to share the joy of the Gospel, and be true citizens of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>718</sup> Dave Hingsburger, "First Communion," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 13, no. 3-4 (2009). p. 174. This article describes how a boy with Down's Syndrome who had been refused Holy Communion because he was thought incapable of understanding it, was finally allowed to share in the Eucharist. The story does not explain how this change of policy came about but does give a clear indication that someone with intellectual limitations can be fully capable of receiving the sacrament.

<sup>719</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*. 24. pp. 17-18.

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